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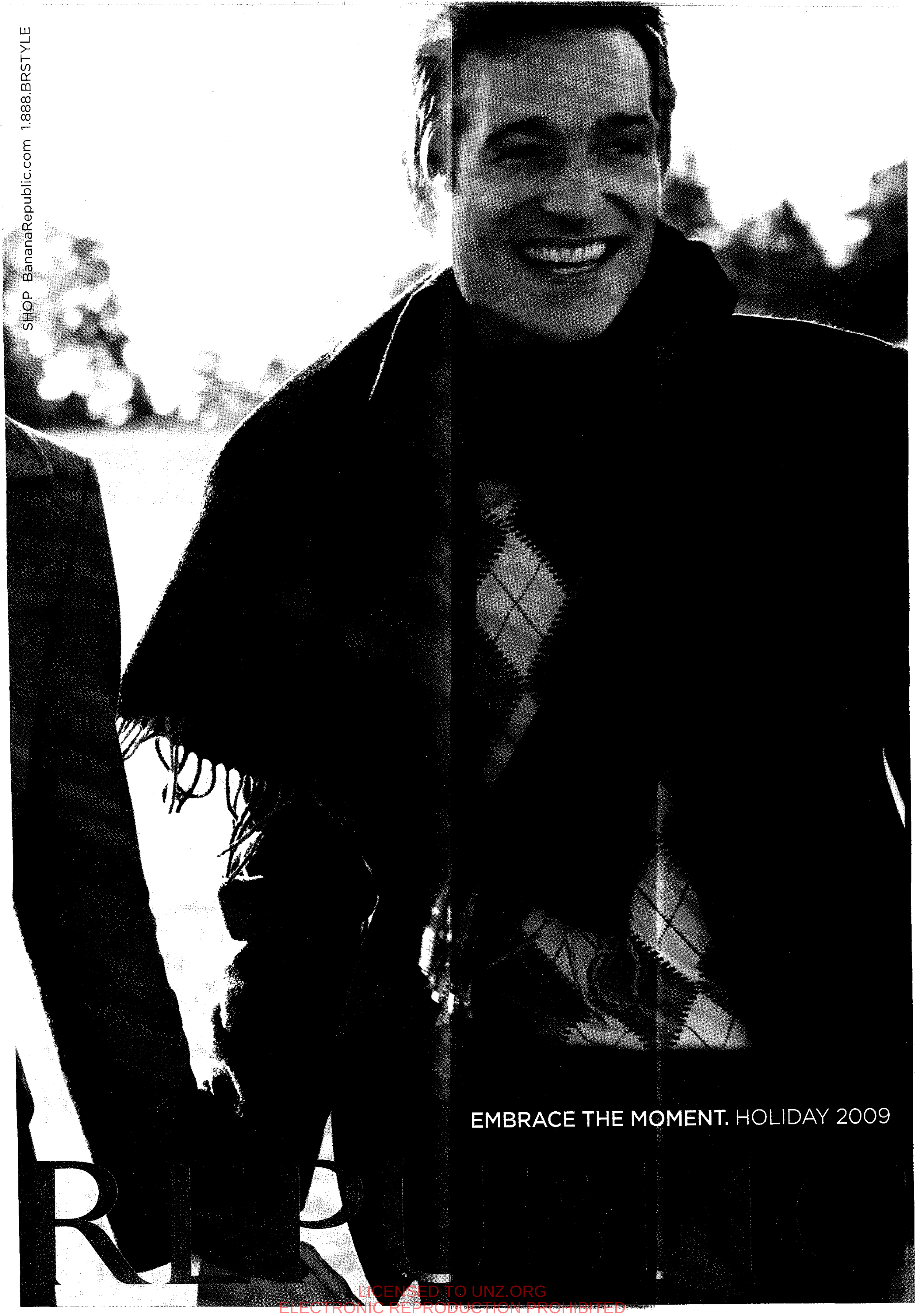
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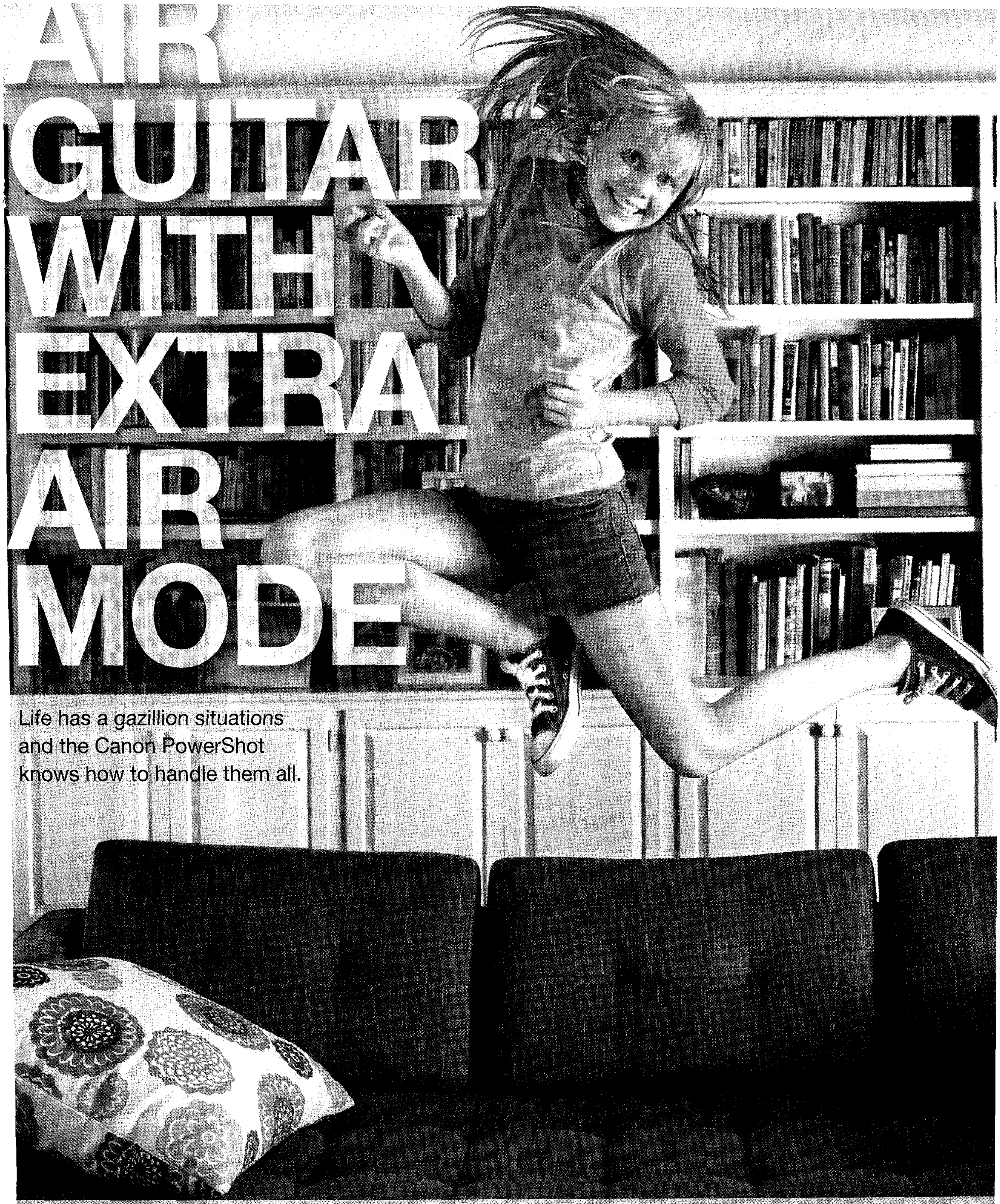

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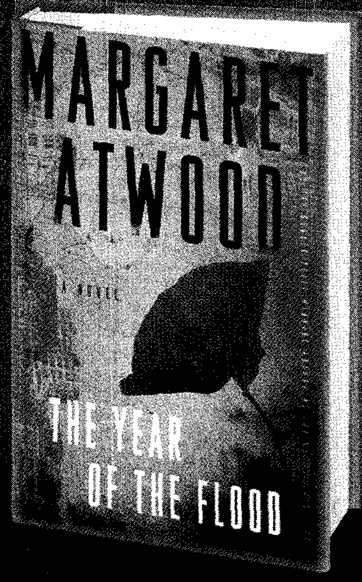

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CONTRIBUTORS

Ian Buruma ("Parade's End," p. 36) is the Henry R. Luce Professor at Bard College. "The China Lover" is his most recent book.

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Platon (Portfolio, p. 51), a staff photographer, won a National Magazine Award for his photo portfolio that appeared in the September 29, 2008, issue of the magazine.

Ian McEwan (Fiction, p. 78) has published ten novels, including "On Chesil Beach." His next novel, "Solar," is due out in the spring.

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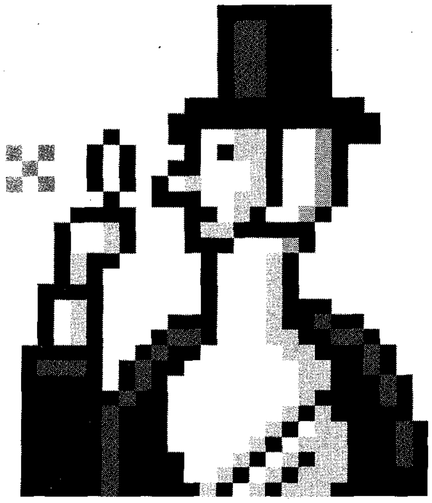
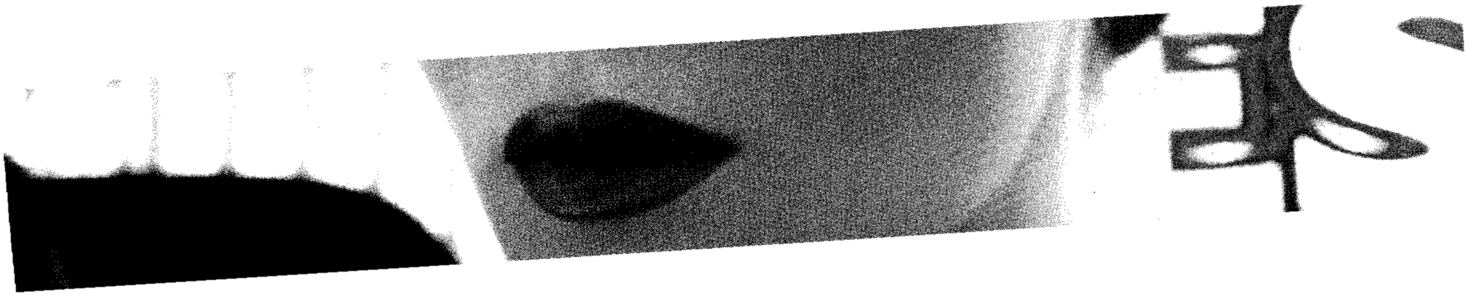
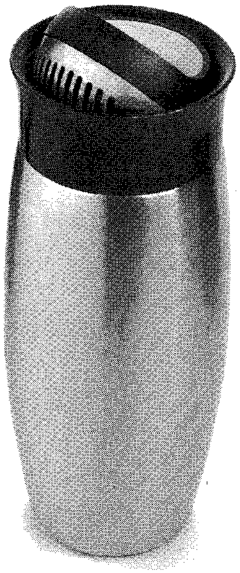
Jan Van Der Veken (Cover) is a Belgian illustrator. This is his first cover for the magazine.

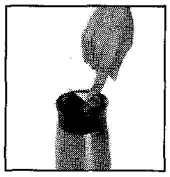
THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM
An interactive version of the "Portraits of Power" portfolio, with audio commentary by *Platon.* / *Jill Lepore* chats live with readers about health-care reform, and *Ryan Lizza* and *Jerome Groopman* talk about it with *Dorothy Wickenden* on the Political Scene podcast. / Video: *Richard Brody's* DVD of the Week; a new Finger Painting by *Jorge Colombo.* / Blogs: *Amy Davidson's* Close Read, *James Surowiecki's* notes on his column, *Macy Halford* on books, and more. / A new Cartoon Kit, with drawings by *Kim Warp.* / Animated cartoons, the caption contest, and a complete archive of issues, back to 1925.





21st Century Shaker





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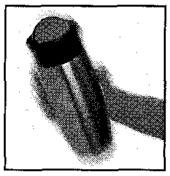

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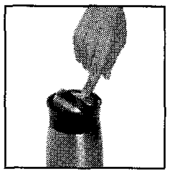

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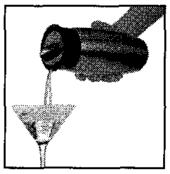

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A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

Jill Lepore, in her article on the murder rate in the United States, cites the scholars Monkkonen and Roth, who have brought us closer to answering an important question: why do Americans kill? (A Critic at Large, November 9th). Building on their research, I have tracked the historical occurrence of assault and battery in New York. After 1800, American courts moved away from the traditional means of handling assault, whereby a magistrate issued bonds of good behavior which involved families and neighbors in preventing future violence, and a speedy (albeit more severe) approach to assaults became the norm. Courts dismissed complaints in droves. Americans no longer feared jail time or punishment for minor assaults, and the courts focussed their energies on murders, rapes, and robberies. Yet murder often arises from assaults that turn deadly. As long as we live in a country where violent confrontation goes unpunished and, indeed, is often celebrated, we will have a homicide rate that befits our belligerence.

Joshua Stein
Schwartz Postdoctoral Fellow
The New School for Social Research
Brooklyn, N.Y.

I appreciate Lepore's discussion of my recent book "When Brute Force Fails." She asks whether the ideas in the book are practical. In Hawaii, their application has halved drug use, new crimes, and incarceration among a group of fifteen hundred felony probationers, most of them methamphetamine users. The program required the coöperation of several agencies, under the leadership of Judge Steven Alm. Such coöperation is the key; if the criminal-justice system can deliver swift and certain sanctions—which need not, and should not, be severe—the majority of offenders will come into line, improving public safety while reducing the number of people behind bars.

Mark A. R. Kleiman
Los Angeles, Calif.

Lepore's analysis of the high homicide rate doesn't take into consideration a fact of American life: the legal doctrine known as "no duty to retreat." The English legal doctrine of "duty to retreat" was reversed by American state supreme courts in the nineteenth century and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1921. To some historians, "no duty to retreat" constituted a "unique American frame of mind," which significantly contributed then and continues to contribute to this nation's lead in homicides. "Stand your ground" laws are on the books in as many as sixteen states. The political will to move away from an armed America depends, in part, on changing laws that currently sustain another kind of moral reckoning: the deeply held cultural belief that it is the measure of "a true man" never to back down from an argument.

Lisa Citron
Los Angeles, Calif.

RANDIAN

Thomas Mallon, in his article on Ayn Rand, touches upon both the allure and the weaknesses of her writing and her philosophy ("Possessed," November 9th). Rand, who left Soviet Russia as a young woman, detested Communism and revered what textbooks term "unfettered" capitalism. But capitalism, in its most extreme form, is the mirror image of Communism—cold, inhuman, inhumane, intractably greedy, and full of contempt for the individual, as well as for societal ideals as a whole. By declaring herself and her followers to be the world's superlatively reasonable people, Rand dehumanized those who disagreed with her, just as the Bolsheviks dehumanized those who disagreed with them. Rand exhibited the qualities she loathed: narcissism, intellectual laziness, and emotional immaturity.

Lisa Turner
Tucson, Ariz.

•

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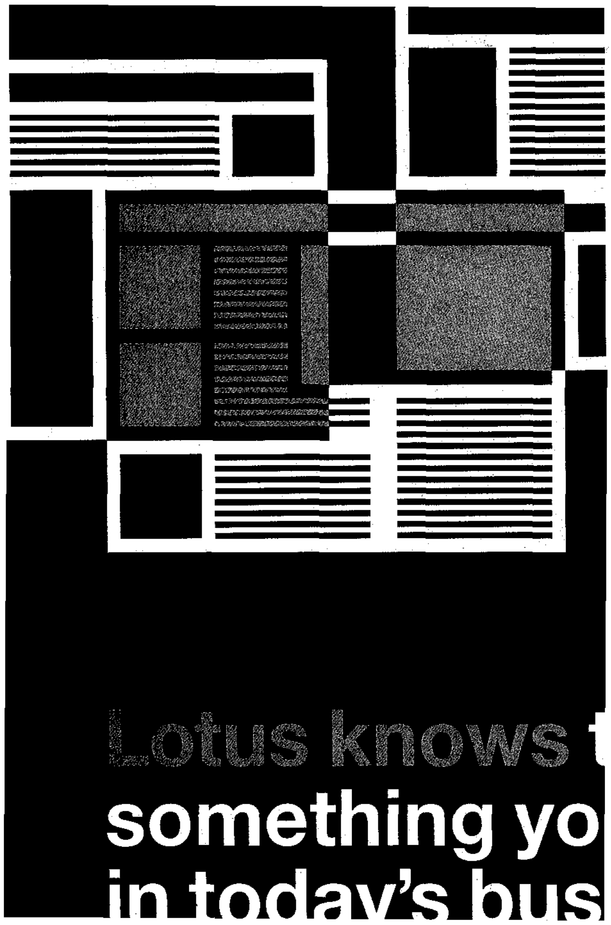
Lotus knows t
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"Slash: Paper Under the Knife," at the Museum of Arts & Design. Photograph by Martine Fougeron.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
ORPHEUS, AXE

Theatre for a New Audience presents "Orpheus X," a new play that transposes the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice to a contemporary world in which Orpheus is a rock star who plays the electric guitar. Rinde Eckert wrote the music and text and Robert Woodruff directs, at the Duke on 42nd Street. (See page 10.)

NIGHT LIFE
GOD BLESS THE CHILD

The singer Madeleine Peyroux has a remarkable voice that has long been likened to, among others, Billie Holiday's. For the past few years, Peyroux has appeared to back away from this comparison, but this week she's making peace with the issue, at least temporarily—she's helping to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Holiday's death with a tribute show at the Blue Note, backed by a first-rate jazz ensemble. (See page 14.)

ART
STILL AND ALL

For the photographer Lee Friedlander, a master of visual intricacy, the conventional still-life genre extends to shadows cast by trees, litter strewn on curbs, and reflections in storefront windows. A new series of Friedlander's black-and-white works is on view at the Borden gallery. (See page 19.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
WING ON WING

Esa-Pekka Salonen, who is currently conducting a revelatory production of Janáček's final opera, "From the House of the Dead," at the Met, will cross the Lincoln Center plaza this week to lead the New York Philharmonic in music by Bartók, Ravel, and Debussy. (See page 20.)

MOVIES
PRINTS OF WHALE

Soon after arriving in Hollywood, the British director James Whale had a hit with "Frankenstein," and returned to horror with "The Invisible Man" and "Bride of Frankenstein." Film Forum's retrospective includes these classics and his work in other genres, including "Show Boat" and the comedy "By Candlelight," as well as "Gods and Monsters," Bill Condon's 1998 bio-pic about him. (See page 25.)

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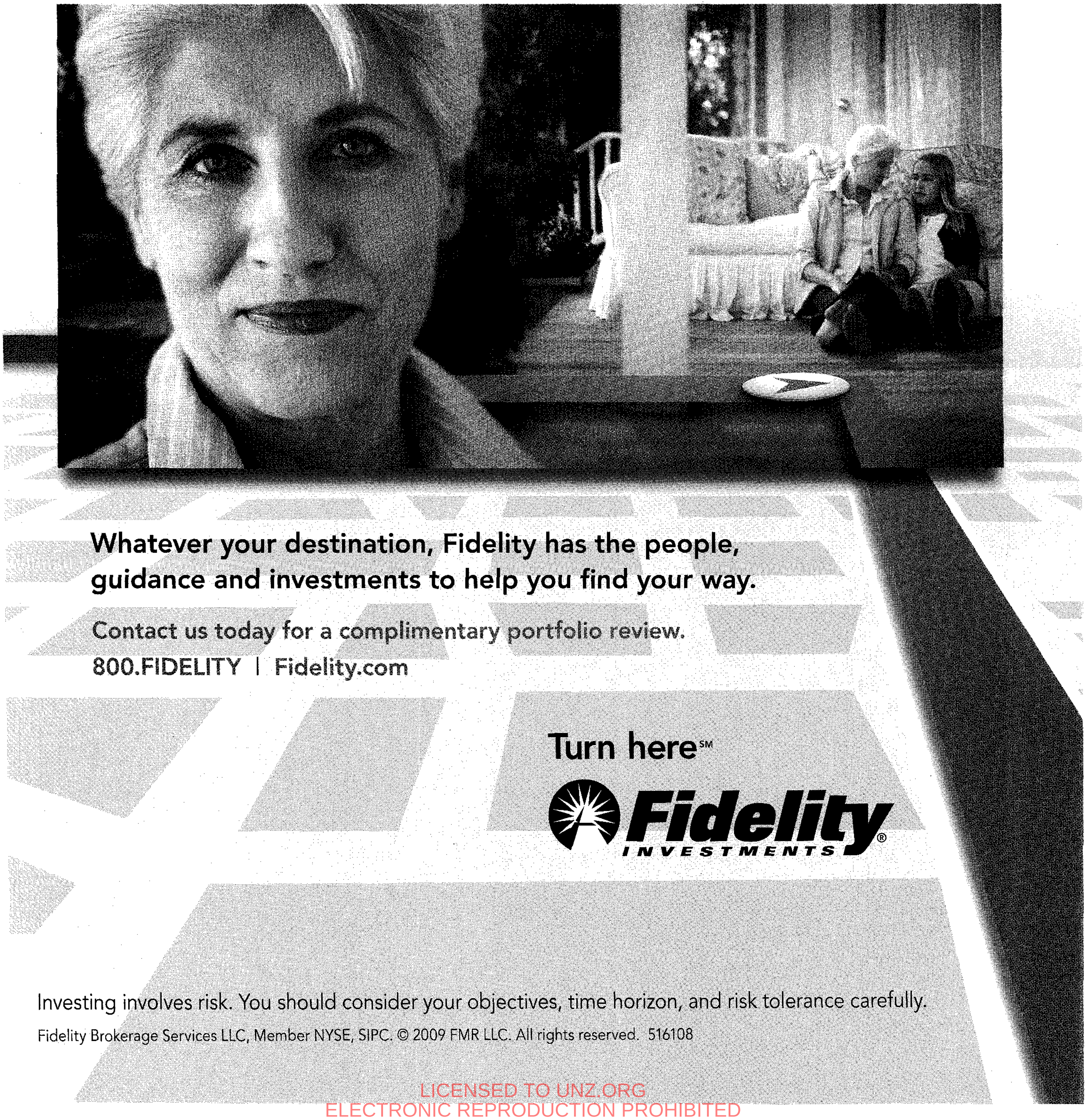

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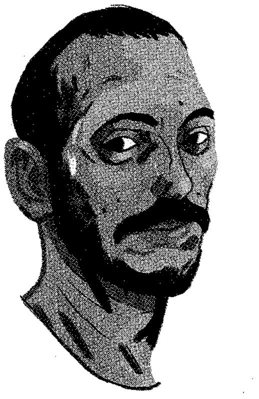
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
TRUE GRIT

The director-choreographer Michael Bennett was forty-four when he died, from AIDS-related lymphoma, in 1987. He was raised in Buffalo, the son of a working-class Jewish mother and Italian father. To say that he was filled with moxie from an early age would be an understatement. After a stint as a dancer, Bennett began choreographing in the mid-sixties; he scored his first success in 1968, with the dances for "Promises, Promises," which is being revived this spring, starring Kristin Chenoweth and Sean Hayes. Bennett's work keeps coming back. Three seasons ago, Broadway was again home to "A Chorus Line," which he conceived, directed, and co-choreographed in 1975. Now the fabled Apollo Theatre is playing host to his 1981 hit, "Dreamgirls" (in the first stop on a national tour), which deals with race, pop music, drugs, and the dissolution of dreams amid show-biz spangles and despair. Taking these ideas into consideration, might one say that Bennett had an interest in American optimism, pretense, and grit?

—Hilton Als



THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

BRIEF ENCOUNTER
The Cornwall-based Kneehigh Company presents Noël Coward's play about an affair between a housewife and a doctor. Emma Rice directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 8. (St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779.)

DO NOT GO GENTLE
Geraint Wyn Davies stars in Leon Pownall's portrait of Dylan Thomas, which imagines the poet in Purgatory, reflecting on his life. In previews. Opens Dec. 6. (Clurman, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE GREAT RECESSION
The Flea presents ten-minute plays by Thomas Bradshaw, Sheila Callaghan, Erin Courtney, Will Eno, Itamar Moses, and Adam Rapp. In previews. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER
Rebecca Gilman wrote this play, based on the novel by Carson McCullers, in which an itinerant deaf loner ends up in a small Southern town during the Depression. Doug Hughes directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 3. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE LAST CARGO CULT
Mike Daisey performs his latest monologue, which examines the financial crisis through the story of a group of people living at the base of an erupting volcano in the South Pacific. Jean-Michele Gregory directs. Previews begin Dec. 3. Opens Dec. 7. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC
Catherine Zeta-Jones, Angela Lansbury, and Alexander Hanson star in Stephen Sondheim and Hugh Wheeler's musical, based on Ingmar Bergman's "Smiles of a Summer Night," a romantic comedy revolving around the affairs of an actress at a Swedish country house. Trevor Nunn directs. In previews. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200.)

MISALLIANCE
Jeff Steitzer directs the Pearl's production of Bernard Shaw's 1909 comedy of manners, set on the English country estate of a newly wealthy underwear tycoon. Previews begin Dec. 4. (City Center Stage II, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

ORPHEUS X
Robert Woodruff directs the Theatre for a New Audience production, written by Rinde Eckert, based on the Orpheus and Eurydice myth. Preview on Dec. 2. Opens Dec. 3. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010.)

RACE
David Mamet directs the world première of his new play, starring James Spader, David Alan Grier, Kerry Washington, and Richard Thomas. In previews. Opens Dec. 6. (Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

RED NOIR
Judith Malina directs a thriller by Anne Waldman, about a female detective who investigates ecological crimes. Previews begin Dec. 7. (Living Theatre, 21 Clinton St. 212-352-3101.)

SO HELP ME GOD!
Mint Theatre Company presents a revival of Maurine Dallas Watkins's 1929 comedy, in which a diva actress is threatened by her understudy. Kristen Johnston and Anna Chlumsky star; Jonathan Bank directs. In previews. Opens Dec. 7. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

THIS
Julianne Nicholson stars in a new play by Melissa James Gibson, about a widowed failed poet entering her forties who is raising a ten-year-old daughter and starting to date. Directed by Daniel Aukin. Opens Dec. 2. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A VERY SANDWICH CHRISTMAS
A surreal cabaret about holiday consumption, from Banana Bag & Bodice ("Beowulf: A Thousand Years of Baggage"). Opens Dec. 3. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

THE AGE OF IRON
At Classic Stage, Brian Kulick directs a mashup of Shakespeare's "Troilus and Cressida" and his contemporary Thomas Heywood's "The Iron Age," both of which chronicle love and battle in the Trojan War. The result leads you to wonder: who needs Thomas Heywood? His scenes of Paris's seduction of Helen make for an alluring prologue, but others simply diffuse Shakespeare's narrative. Nevertheless, Kulick's direction is sleek and inventive (the set is a giant sandbox), and the cast—including Finn Wittrock, as Troilus, and the impish Steven Rattazzi, as Thersites—is excellent. It's to Kulick's credit that the sweep and the sexiness of both plays seem to stretch beyond the confines of the theatre's walls; Shakespeare might have called it "a great reckoning in a little room."(136 E. 13th St. 212-352-3101.)

DREAMGIRLS
Is it possible to name one great American musical that isn't cheesy at its core? "Dreamgirls" is as ripe as Camembert left out a trifle too long, but it's still delectable, almost three decades after it was created. While most audiences are familiar with the show because of Bill Condon's 2006 film adaptation, nothing can compare to its source material, which is wildly propulsive, hard on actors, and brilliant as hell. A girl group named the Dreamettes rises to stardom in a Berry Gordy-inspired music factory, but not before the group's boss, Curtis Taylor, Jr. (Chaz Lamar Shepherd), dumps the lead singer, Effie Melody White (the astonishing Moya Angela), who is also his girlfriend, for Deena Jones (the powerhouse Syesha Mercado), who becomes his great crossover star, and his lover. In juxtaposing rhythm and blues and pop, Michael Bennett, who conceived and directed the original production, was drawing fairly obvious parallels between authentic and manufactured artistry, but that's O.K.: he dressed it up in loads of emotions, good dance routines, and demanding material that brings out the diva in every actor involved. (In addition to Angela and Mercado, Chester Gregory is a lot of fun as the vain, self-absorbed showman James Thunder Early.) There's not one misstep in this revival, directed by Robert Longbottom, which throbs with a lovely need to please, an orchestra that's not overly miked, and a chorus that supports the show's stars while knowing its own importance. (Apollo, 253 W. 125th St. 212-307-4100.)

FELA!
Bill T. Jones directs and choreographs this musical about Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the activist musician who pioneered Afro-beat. With a book by Jim Lewis and Jones. (Reviewed in this issue.) (O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

FINIAN'S RAINBOW
The 1947 musical (directed by Warren Carlyle) doesn't have narrative brilliance, but it has the lyrics of Yip Harburg and the music of Burton Lane, which are genius enough. The show was the first full-fledged attempt to marry the African-American folk-musical traditions (gospel, blues) with Broadway panache; the Heaven it sings of is Broadway abundance, but with a distinctive progressive twist and an overlay of social justice. The cast is led by the splendid Jim Norton, as Finian, who steals a pot of gold from a leprechaun in Ireland and wants to bury it near Fort Knox. That's as much plot as you'll get here, but a tip of the cloth cap to the adapter, Arthur Perlman, and to the producers, David Richenthal and Jack Viertel, for bringing some clarity and crispness to the vexed book, by Fred Saidy and Harburg. Finian's daughter, Sharon, is played by the fine-voiced Kate Baldwin, who gets to sing such standards as "How Are Things in Glocca Morra?," "Look to the Rainbow," and "Old Devil Moon." (Reviewed in our issue of 11/30/09.) (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200.)

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY
Sarah Ruhl's new play (superbly directed by Les Waters) takes us back to the corseted, alabaster eighteen-eighties, in the early days of electricity,

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Everlon™ is a trademark used under license from the De Beers Group of Companies when the vibrator was used by physicians to enhance a form of genital massage, which had been practiced for centuries as a treatment for hysteria. A game of positive and negative charges is announced in the play's first beat, when Catherine (the pert Laura Benanti), the sweetly scatterbrained wife of Dr. Givings (Michael Cerveris), plays with an electric light to amuse her newborn daughter. In Annie Smart's handsome set, the doctor's office—his "operating theatre"—is adjacent to his well-appointed living room: a sort of split screen of psychological realms. While Dr. Givings is treating hysteria in his office, his benevolent inattentiveness is fuelling it at home. Part of the comedy of Ruhl's play—her most commercial and her best to date—is her nonjudgmental attack on a sensational subject. Ruhl's playwriting is inspired; in the second act, she never falters as she puts her characters through the paces of passion with a special high-comic gravity and grace. (11/30/09) (Lyceum, 149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE STARRY MESSENGER
Kenneth Lonergan wrote and directs this drama for the New Group. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
Cate Blanchett stars in Tennessee Williams's play from 1947, in a Sydney Theatre Company production, directed by Liv Ullmann. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100.)

ZERO HOUR
The artifice of theatre is especially fragile when it comes to one-person shows, but the writer-actor Jim Brochu and the director Piper Laurie have navigated all the potential hazards in this production. Brochu plays Zero Mostel, who, in 1977, has consented to be interviewed in his studio on West Twenty-eighth Street. The unseen and unheard reporter is regaled, insulted, bullied, and seduced by Mostel, who talks about his early life in Brooklyn, his unlikely entry into the theatre, his love of painting, and his blacklisting, and tells revealing backstage Broadway stories. It all flows with commendable naturalness, providing plenty of big laughs as well as hushed drama. After a while, you stop caring whether a particular line is Brochu's or Mostel's; all you know is that you've been privy to the work of a great comedian. (Theatre at St. Clements, 423 W. 46th St. 212-279-4200.)

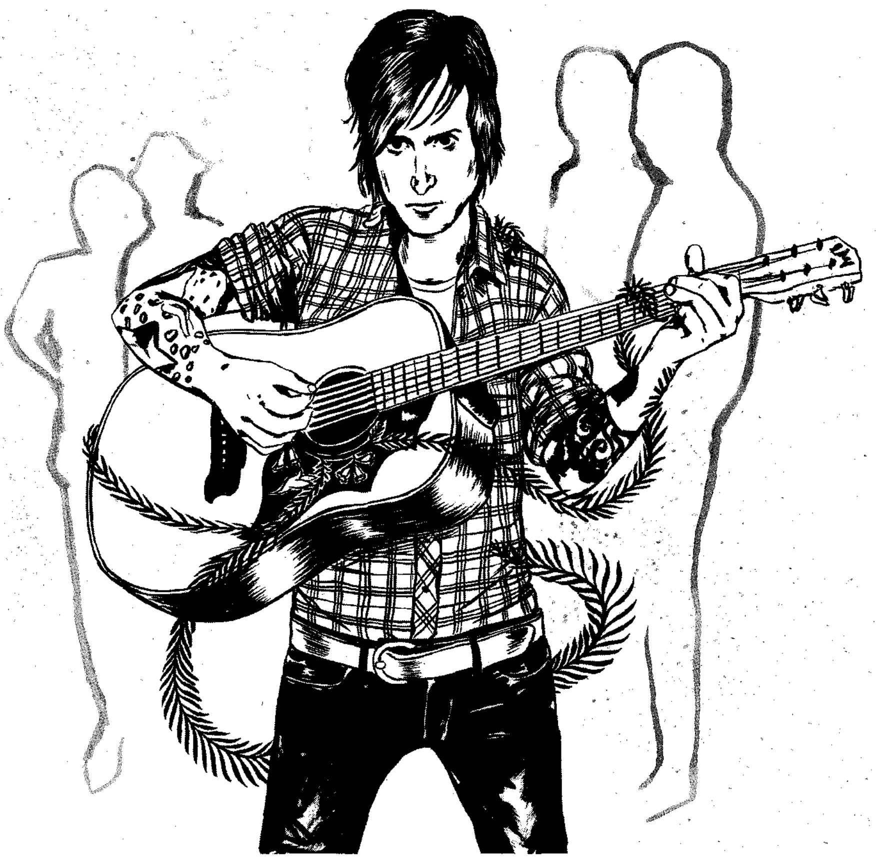
Also Playing

AFTER MISS JULIE: American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 212-719-1300. Through Dec. 6. **AVENUE Q:** New World Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **BILLY ELLIOT THE MUSICAL:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE BROTHER/SISTER PLAYS:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **BYE BYE BIRDIE:** Henry Miller, 124 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **THE EMPEROR JONES:** Irish Repertory, 132 W. 22nd St. 212-727-2737. Through Dec. 6. **GOD OF CARNAGE:** Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAIR: THE AMERICAN TRIBAL LOVE-ROCK MUSICAL:** Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **HAMLET:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 6. **IDIOT SAVANT:** Public, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. **IRVING BERLIN'S WHITE CHRISTMAS:** Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LATE CHRISTOPHER BEAN:** Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. **LET ME DOWN EASY:** Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422. **LOVE, LOSS, AND WHAT I WORE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 212-239-6200. **MEMPHIS:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **NEXT TO NORMAL:** Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **NIGHTINGALE:** City Center Stage I, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. **THE ORPHANS' HOME CYCLE: PART I:** Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-352-3101. **OUR TOWN:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444. **POST NO BILLS:** Rattlestick, 224 Waverly Pl. 212-868-4444. **RAGTIME:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **THE ROYAL FAMILY:** Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. **A STEADY RAIN:** Schoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 6. **SUPERIOR DONUTS:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THE UNDERSTUDY:** Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300. **WISHFUL DRINKING:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

THE BELL HOUSE
149 7th St., between Second and Third Aves., Brooklyn (718-643-6510)—Dec. 2: The **Mountain Goats,** which is the name that John Darnielle, a prolific musician and master lyricist, has used for nearly two decades. The Goats' latest release, "The Life of the World to Come," is constructed around Biblical verses, with songs such as "Genesis 3:23" and "Psalms 40:2." On this tour, Darnielle is accompanied by his longtime rhythm section, the bassist Peter Hughes and the drummer Jon Wurster. Dec. 4: Halifax's **Sloan** makes music full of bright lyrics and even brighter pop riffs. The band members—Chris Murphy, Andrew Scott, Patrick Pentland, and Jay Ferguson—share instrumental and vocal duties, and all contribute songs to the playlist.



Butch Walker roots through his back catalogue during a three-night stand at Joe's Pub.

CARMEN SEGOVIA

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 3: **Big Pink.** With **Crystal Antlers** (see the Music Hall of Williamsburg). Dec. 6: **Ted Leo and the Pharmacists** deliver socially conscious, jumpy, upbeat songs with heart-pounding beats, masterly melodies, and a punk feel. With **JEFF The Brotherhood,** the Orrall brothers' grungy guitar-and-drum duo, and **Stupid Party,** a garage-punk band from Brooklyn.

CAFFÈ VIVALDI
32 Jones St. (212-691-7538)—Dec. 1: The Italian singer-songwriter Valerio Piccolo, who counts Suzanne Vega among his fans.

EUROPA NIGHT CLUB
98-104 Meserole Ave., at Manhattan Ave., Greenpoint, Brooklyn (718-383-5723)—Dec. 3: Music blogs may try to make the case that **Gil Mantera's Party Dream** has evolved over the years, and that the group now crafts sophisticated synth-pop contemplations of eighties New Wave. But the truth is that this bizarre Ohio duo is still a party band, and their outrageous live shows (complete with vocoded vocals, fist-pumping dance moves, and Speedos a size too small) prove it.

GRAMERCY THEATRE
127 E. 23rd St. (877-598-8694)—Dec. 4: **Nitzer Ebb,** the techno-industrial group with a Teutonic-sounding name and a militaristic look, formed in 1982, in Chelmsford, England. During the eighties and early nineties, the group had several aggressive dance hits, including "Join in the Chant," which featured harsh programmed beats, a quickly moving, repetitive bass line, and angry, barked vocals from the lead singer, Douglas McCarthy. While Nitzer Ebb opened for synth-pop bands like Depeche Mode, the group's austere, mechanistic songs were generally less accessible than those of many of their dance-music contemporaries. Still, its legacy (Detroit techno, for example, was influenced by Nitzer Ebb's sound) has arguably been more pervasive. In 2006, after a decade-long hiatus, two of the founding members, McCarthy and the singer and multi-instrumentalist Vaughan (Bon) Harris, re-formed the group and began touring their old hits alongside new material for a soon-to-be-released album.

HIGHLINE BALLROOM
431 W. 16th St. (212-414-5994)—Dec. 6: Channelling the radical stance and the disregard for stylistic parameters that were a hallmark of the Clash, New York City's **Outernational** is hellbent on restoring righteous indignation to rock and roll through a propulsive, ska-inflected attack. The group is currently performing material from its new EP, "Eyes on Fire," which was produced by Tom Morello, the similarly inclined string-bender from Rage Against the Machine.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—**Butch Walker** left his post fronting the chart-grazing modern-

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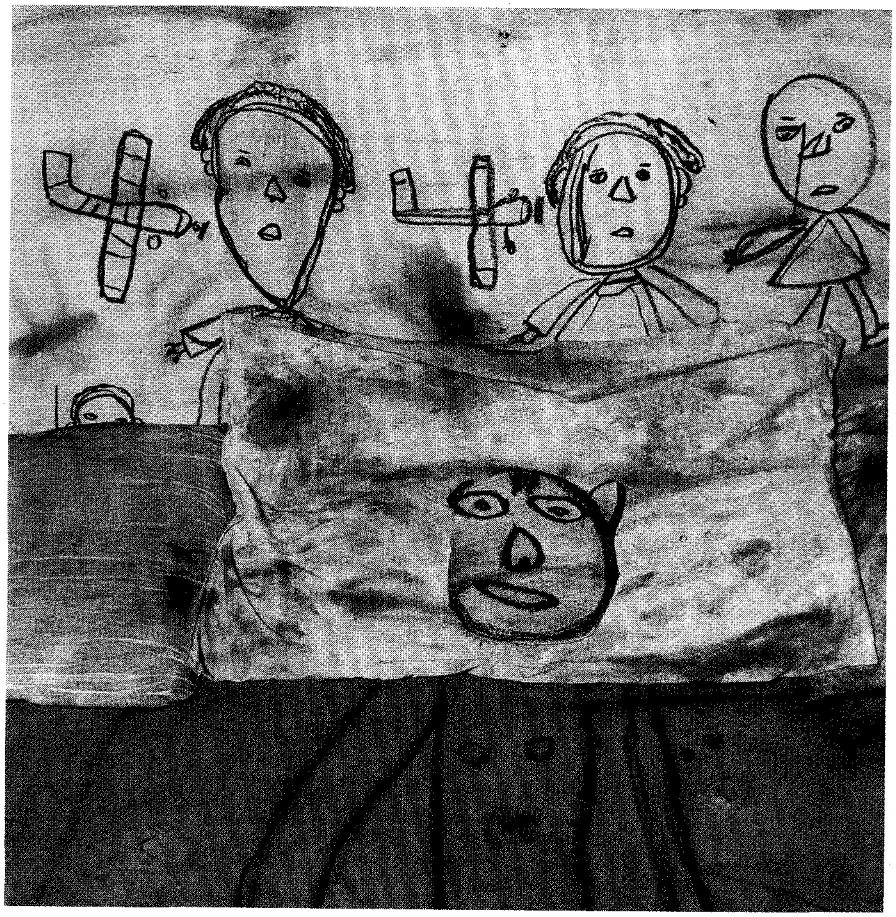
rock band Marvelous 3 to produce songs for Avril Lavigne, Simple Plan, the Donnas, and many other artists, but he hasn't lost his taste for the rock-and-roll life. In fact, he glamorized it to great effect on his 2006 album, "The Rise and Fall of Butch Walker and the Let's-Go-Out-Tonites," which is full of tales of sex and glitter. But his life hasn't just been one big party. In the fall of 2007, the house he was renting in Malibu, containing all his possessions, was destroyed in a wildfire. His 2008 solo album, "Sycamore Meadows," is named for the street where that house once stood. He's here Dec. 4-6, playing a full album each night. The first show features his 2004 release, "Letters," the second is devoted to "Rise and Fall," and the third focusses on "Sycamore." He'll also do some covers and maybe a track or two from his forthcoming LP, "I Liked You Better When You Had No Heart."



Roger Ballen's photograph "Collision" (2005), at the Gagosian gallery.

© ROGER BALLEN. COURTESY GAGOSIAN GALLERY

MUSIC HALL OF WILLIAMSBURG
66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn (718-486-5400)—Dec. 4: Named after the house upstate in Saugerties where Dylan and the Band produced some of their best material, the British duo **Big Pink** couldn't be farther from the kind of roots-rock that the house is known for. Recently signed to the famed British indie label 4AD, Big Pink put out a largely self-produced début album, "A Brief History of Love," a wall-of-sound pop record that's as ambitious as its title suggests. They are supported by **Crystal Antlers,** a psychedelic punk act best enjoyed in small doses.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 6: Twenty years ago, the irreverent Long Island heavy-metal band **Twisted Sister** locked horns with Tipper Gore's Parents Music Resource Center. My, how times have changed. These days, the band members, who still have a habit of dressing like unconvincing transvestites, prefer to perform Christmas carols. They deliver "O Come All Ye Faithful," "Silver Bells," and other holiday favorites in head-banging style.

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Dec. 4: The singer-songwriter **Brendan Benson** is perhaps most well known as the foil to the mercurial Jack White in the Raconteurs. With his taste for big guitar hooks apparently sated by his work with that group, Benson has brought out a series of endearingly straightforward and restrained pop albums. His latest effort is called "My Old, Familiar Friend."

ROCKWOOD MUSIC HALL
196 Allen St. (212-477-4155)—Dec. 3: The **Flying Change.** Four years ago, the wife of the New York-based singer-songwriter Sam Jacobs, the leader of this twelve-piece band, began to suffer from a mysterious, debilitating nerve ailment. Neither consultations at the Mayo Clinic nor surgery could alleviate her symptoms, but she still managed to build a successful jewelry business, and her perseverance became the inspiration for Jacobs's lush new album, "Pain Is a Reliable Signal." On songs like "The Mayo Clinic" and "Dirty White Coats," Jacobs transforms the ordeal of his wife (whom he is in the midst of divorcing) into three-minute philosophical meditations formed around simple chord changes, laid-back tempos, and his sensitive baritone vocals. A first-rate band that includes Katie Scheele, on oboe and English horn, Dan Levine, on trombone and euphonium, and Stan Harrison, on saxophones and flute, provides harmonically lush accompaniment. The show is billed as a symposium, with the daunting title "Perspectives, Narrators and Duality: Misunderstandings from Modern Literature," and will feature a whimsical course reader on such themes as "reality and perception" for the audience to peruse during the set.

UNION POOL
484 Union Ave., Brooklyn (718-609-0484)—Dec. 3: **Dan Friel** has made a name for himself in recent years working with his local avant-rock act Parts & Labor, and as a solo musician he has performed with artists as varied as Damo Suzuki (of Can) and Thurston Moore. For those with the stomach to confront the laser-fried keyboards and charred drum machines on his 2008 LP, "Ghost Town," there are surprisingly captivating and nuanced melodies submerged beneath the vast ocean of Friel's byzantine electronic arrangements. With **Dinowalrus** and **Mirror Mirror.**

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Dec. 1: The **Mountain Goats** (see the Bell House). Dec. 4: **Mew** is a curious ensemble from Denmark that plays ambitious psychedelic indie rock. The band's latest album, "No More Stories / Are Told Today / I'm Sorry / They Washed Away / No More Stories / The World Is Grey / I'm Tired / Let's Wash Away," carefully strives to find a palatable middle ground between pop accessibility and freaky, experimental forays into the sonic beyond.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (212-581-3080)—Dec. 2-5: Still surrounded by the aura of her now legendary Broadway triumph in "Grey Gardens," **Christine Ebersole** takes command of a more intimate stage, with support from her musical director, **Billy Stritch.**

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Dec. 1-3: Diminished perhaps in strength but not in imagination, the pianist **McCoy Tyner** asserts his estimable influence. Dec. 4-6: The singer **Madeleine Peyroux** pays tribute to Billie Holiday, backed by the guitarist **Russell Malone,** the trumpeter **Avishai Cohen,** and the saxophonist **Marcus Strickland,** among others.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—The pianist **Arturo O'Farrill** can usually be found at the helm of his lavish Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra. Scaling down with his Latin Jazz All Star Sextet, as he does here Dec. 1-6, should in no way lessen the excitement he generates.

FEINSTEIN'S AT LOEWS REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Dec. 1-30: **David Hyde Pierce,** who has conquered television and Broadway, hits the cabaret circuit for a holiday show with the masterly entertainer **Michael Feinstein.**

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 2: As he did so winningly on the 2008 album "The Mancini Project," the saxophonist **Ted Nash** turns his attention to the durable yet too often disregarded tunes of the famed Hollywood composer Henry Mancini. Dec. 3-6: The beloved drummer and bandleader Art Blakey, who died in 1990, would have turned ninety this year. A slew of Jazz Messenger veterans, including **Curtis Fuller, Donald Harrison, Javon Jackson, Mulgrew Miller,** and **Peter Washington,** pay homage.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 2: The trumpeter **Ingrid Jensen,** a linchpin of Maria Schneider's orchestra, fronts a quartet bolstered by the accomplished pianist **Geoffrey Keezer.** Dec. 3-6: The pianist **Chano Domínguez** reinterprets Miles Davis's timeless 1959 album, "Kind of Blue," for a flamenco ensemble that includes the dancer **Tomasito.**

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (800-745-3000)—Dec. 3: **Herb Alpert's** reputation as a full-throttle trumpeter stems from his days leading the hitmaking Tijuana Brass. A few decades on, his horn has cooled down, making it the perfect accompaniment for his wife, the singer **Lani Hall.**

(LE) POISSON ROUGE
158 Bleecker St. (212-505-3474)—Dec. 5: **Lionel Loueke's** forthcoming album, "Mwaliko," finds the inventive guitarist from Benin performing with guests who include the singer Angelique Kidjo and the bassists Esperanza Spalding and Richard Bona. Here, he keeps good company with his regular trio mates, the bassist **Massimo Biolcati** and the drummer **Ferenc Nemeth,** who also appear on the album.

SMALLS
183 W. 10th St. (212-252-5091)—The pianist **Ehud Asherie** is a master of swing and stride, who always invites a guest for off-the-cuff duets here. On Dec. 3, he's joined by the saxophonist **Harry Allen.** The saxophonist **Michael Blake** and his quintet, featuring the pianist **Frank Kimbrough,** follow.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 1-6: Among the recent influx of talented Israeli jazz musicians, **Anat Cohen** stands out for her proficiency on the saxophone and the clarinet, as well as for the ease with which she navigates styles from pre-swing to post-bop.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—**"Velázquez Rediscovered."** Through Feb. 7. ♦ **"The 'Young Archer,' Attributed to Michelangelo."** Ongoing. ♦ **"Art of the Samurai: Japanese Arms and Armor, 1156-1868."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"American Stories: Paintings of Everyday Life, 1765-1915."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Looking In: Robert Frank's 'The Americans.'"** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Bauhaus 1919-1933: Workshops for Modernity."** Through Jan. 25. ♦ **"Tim Burton."** Through April 26. ♦ **"Monet's Water Lilies."** Through April 12. ♦ **"New Photography 2009: Walead Beshty, Daniel Gordon, Leslie Hewitt, Carter Mull, Sterling Ruby, Sara VanDerBeek."** Through Jan. 11. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—**"Kandinsky."** Through Jan. 13. ♦ **"Anish Kapoor: Memory."** Through March 28. (Open Fridays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Saturday evenings until 7:45.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (212-570-3600)—**"Roni Horn aka Roni Horn."** Through Jan. 24. ♦ **"Georgia O'Keeffe: Abstraction."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

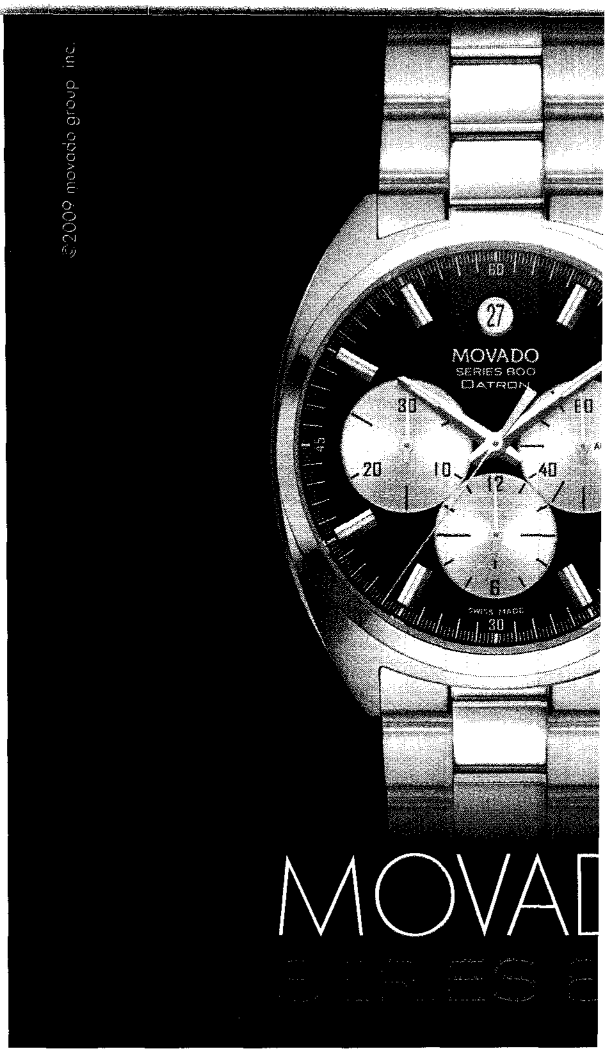
BROOKLYN MUSEUM
200 Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—**"Who Shot Rock & Roll: A Photographic History, 1955 to the Present."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"James Tissot: 'The Life of Christ.'"** Through Jan. 17. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5, and weekends, 11 to 6.)

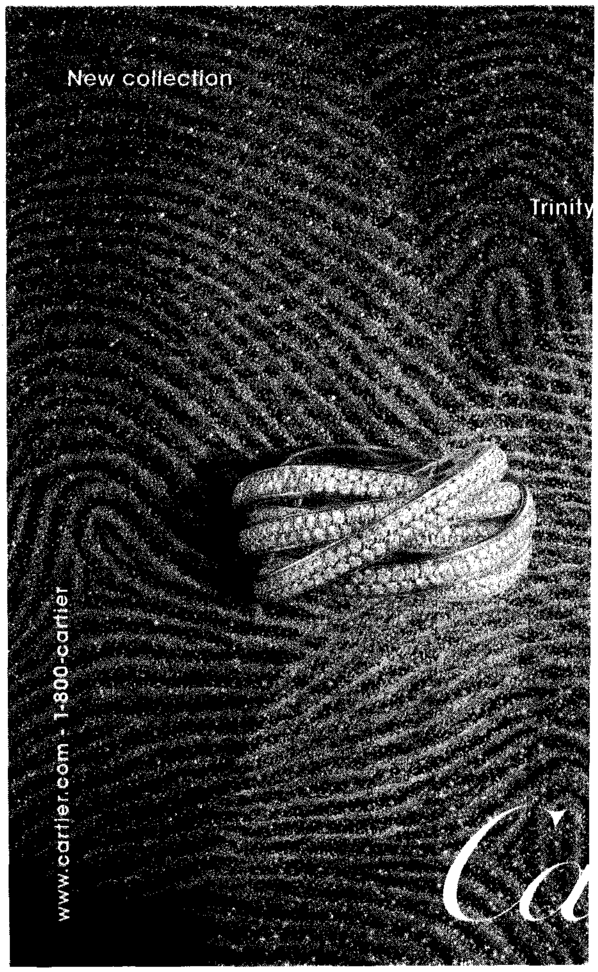
AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World."** Through Aug. 15. ♦ **"Extreme Mammals: The Biggest, Smallest, and Most Amazing Mammals of All Time."** Through Jan. 3. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—**"Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection."** Through Jan. 10. ♦ **"Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop."** Through Jan. 17. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

JEWISH MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. (212-423-3200)—**"Alias Man Ray: The Art of Reinvention."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life."** Through Feb. 7. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 5:45, Thursdays, 11 to 8, and Fridays, 11 to 4.)

MORGAN LIBRARY & MUSEUM
225 Madison Ave., at 36th St. (212-685-0008)—**"A Woman's Wit: Jane Austen's Life and Legacy."** Death, marriage, and fabric occupied Austen in her letters, of which she wrote an estimated three thousand in her forty-one years (only a hundred and sixty re-





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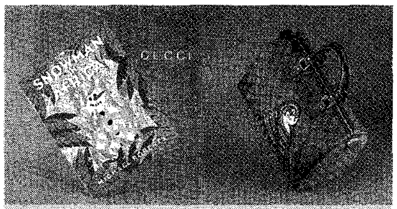

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main). The examples here, in Austen's tidy, compact script, are all but unreadable. Wall labels translate: a woman's purple muslin gown "does not become her complexion"; a Miss Jackson has married a Mr. Gunthorpe, who "swears, drinks, is cross, jealous, selfish & Brutal." Hand-colored prints by James Gillray (1757-1815) satirize the same social types that the writer dissected in her novels, while letters and diaries by Yeats, Nabokov, and Sir Walter Scott affirm Austen's greatness and her lingering influence—as if that were necessary. Through March 14. ♦ **"William Blake's World: 'A New Heaven Is Begun.'"** Through Jan. 3. ♦ **"Rococo and Revolution: Eighteenth-Century French Drawings."** Through Jan. 3. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10:30 to 5, Fridays, 10:30 to 9, Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

MUSEUM OF ARTS & DESIGN
2 Columbus Circle (212-299-7777)—**"Read My Pins: The Madeleine Albright Collection."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Slash: Paper Under the Knife."** Through April 4. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Fifth Ave. at 103rd St. (212-534-1672)—**"Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future."** Through Jan. 31. ♦ **"Legacy: The Preservation of Wilderness in New York City."** Whether working in Cape Cod, Tuscany, or the ruins at Ground Zero, the photographer Joel Meyerowitz has always come away with landscapes that are both flawlessly composed and intensely felt. So it's especially puzzling to find his views of parks in the five boroughs—the first commissioned survey undertaken since 1930—pretty as postcards and just as flat. It doesn't help that several of them are blown up to mural size and hung like unstretched canvases at the exhibition's entrance, where they look like hotel-lobby décor. More modestly scaled photographs focus on areas of untamed beauty, seen in all seasons. With few people and almost no litter or graffiti in sight, this is an idealized view, reassuring but bland. Through March 21. ♦ **"Only in New York: Photographs from *Look* Magazine."** Through Jan. 18. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
170 Central Park W., at 77th St. (212-873-3400)—**"Lincoln and New York."** Through March 25. ♦ **"John Brown: The Abolitionist and His Legacy."** Through March 25. ♦ **"Nature and the American Vision: The Hudson River School at the New-York Historical Society."** Through March 25. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 to 6, and Friday evenings until 8.)

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Fifth Ave. at 42nd St. (212-869-8089)—**"Mapping New York's Shoreline, 1609-2009: Celebrating the Quadricentennial of Henry Hudson's Exploration of the Waterways of New York."** Through June 26. ♦ **"Candide at 250: Scandal and Success."** Through April 25. (Open Mondays, 11 to 6, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11 to 7:30, Thursdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 1 to 5.)

P.S. 1 CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER
22-25 Jackson Ave., at 46th Ave., Long Island City (718-784-2084)—**"1969."** Through April 5. ♦ **"Between Spaces."** Through April 5. (Open Thursdays through Mondays, noon to 6.)

STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM
144 W. 125th St. (212-864-4500)—**"30 Seconds Off an Inch."** Through March 14. ♦ **"Wardell Milan: Drawings of Harlem."** Through March 14. ♦ **"A Delicate Touch: Watercolors from the Permanent Collection."** Through March 14. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, and Sundays, noon to 6, and Saturdays, 10 to 6.)

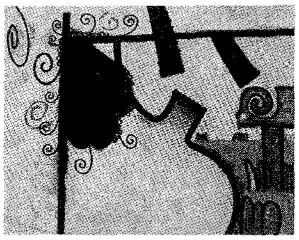
GALLERIES—UPTOWN

PHILIP GUSTON
A day-brightening show, ideal for the holidays, of vicarious stocking stuffers (only three are for sale) rounds up forty-seven very small paintings from the early phase, 1969-73, of Guston's obstreperously cartoonish last style. Hooded figures, cars, shoes, cigars, and bulbous books, buildings, and lights do

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
EARTHLY DELIGHTS

Carroll Dunham is working blue. That fact won't shock fans of the painter—he arrived, in the eighties, with polymorphously perverse abstractions that gave way to a ribald world of phallus-faced men—but his new show at Gladstone just might. The best paintings of Dunham's career are also his most explicit: joyous updates of Gustave Courbet's "The Origin of the World," which transplant the female nude from the boudoir to a cartoon-bright Eden. A hint that this might be all about Eve appears at the entrance, in a picture of a tree bearing red flowers in lieu of forbidden fruit. But Dunham's book of genesis is painting and the scripture cited here runs from van Gogh's "The Starry Night" and Cézanne's "The Bather" to ukiyo-e erotica (jet-black hair is styled like a geisha's) and the splay-legged women of late Picasso. Surfaces are aqueous and furious, splattered and smeared. Cropping plays pictorial games with abstraction. A confrontational pink derrière would dissolve into minimalist, Robert Mangold-like curves if not for the rude joke of a tree trunk spied between thighs in the landscape. There's no mistaking the nature of this figure-ground relationship.

—*Andrea K. Scott*



CARROLL DUNHAM, "(HERS) NIGHT AND DAY #4" (2009) star turns, graced with the artist's licking, preternaturally sentient touch and under-the-skin palette (bruised reds, moody blues, black). They epitomize the special potency of certain little things, such as jewels and hand grenades. Through Dec. 31. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-688-5951.)

DAVID HOCKNEY

People are talking, with scant agreement, about Hockney's two-gallery extravaganza of Yorkshire woods and roads, painted sumptuously in spatial recessions that pointedly reject centered perspective. The artist masters the hardest passage of landscape—the middle ground—in ways that justify his claim of making the viewer a figure in the picture: your eye walks you into the near distances, accelerated by van Gogh's trick of decreasing the size of cobbled brushstrokes. Light is generalized, and color is catchy but arbitrary: visual perfume. There is no sensitivity to nature except as a pretext for virtuosity. (Anyone familiar with hawthorns must protest Hockney's travesties of that insolent tree.) The paintings work best as stage sets for yet another performance of Hockney's lyrically infectious self-satisfaction. Through Dec. 24. (PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292.)

RAY PARKER

Perhaps because they've been so long obscure, proto-Color Field paintings by Parker, circa 1959-1963, feel spankingly fresh, relative to contemporaneous Nolands and Olitskis. With brushy vigor, in oils, on largish gessoed canvases, Parker deployed two or more brawny, ragged-edged blocks of dense, mutedly ardent hues. (Off-purples notably impress.) Rothko-like formats deliver color shapes in hardly Rothko-like solid punches. Parker retained New York School scale and excitement while eschewing pathos: Abstract Expressionism without tears. Why aren't these handsome feats better known? It's not fair. Through Jan. 9. (Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. 212-397-6780.)

JANE WILSON

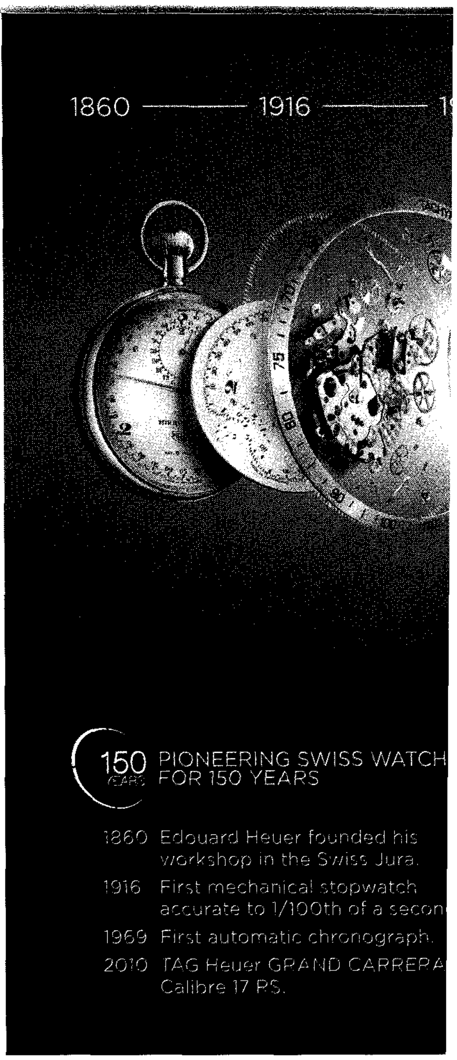
Peak work from the Hamptons painter at the age of eighty-five: eventful skyscapes with low horizons of sea or land. Wilson is a great scumbler of warm and cool, unnameable colors, à la Bonnard, rendering atmospheres both outdoor and emotional. A specific thrill ripples through each of the many oils and watercolors, pertaining to weather ("Fast-Moving Storm," "Sweltering Sunset"), time ("Surf at Midnight," "Too Early for Breakfast"), or studio epiphany ("Ghostly Blue"). Commonly associated with Fairfield Porter, Wilson salutes another, inconspicuous but apposite hero in one work: "Remembering Burchfield." Through Dec. 23. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 212-247-2111.)

"PROCESSED: CONSIDERING RECENT PHOTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES"

The academic title can't begin to contain the curator Amie Scally's super-shrewd exhibition of slippery, messy, anything-goes work by seven artists. Though their methods vary widely, their images all involve some sort of hands-on manipulation of photographic paper, in or out of the darkroom, with largely unpredictable and decidedly nonrepresentational results. Wolfgang Tillmans and Marco Breuer, the best known of the group, show gorgeous abstractions that are both densely worked and anarchic. There's a kind of furious exuberance to Tamar Halpern's loosely patched-together pictures and Jennifer West's neo-psychedelic videos and wall pieces (one of which drapes onto the floor). Markus Amm uses the chance effects of light, heat, and chemistry on folded paper to conjure potent black magic. Through Dec. 12. (Leubsdorf Gallery, Hunter College, 68th St. at Lexington Ave. 212-772-4991.)

Short List

ROGER BALLEN: Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 23. **BRUCE DAVIDSON:** Howard Greenberg, 41 E. 57th St. 212-334-0010. Through Jan. 2. **GERHARD RICHTER:** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160. Through Jan. 9. **"THE ORIGINS OF EL GRECO: ICON PAINTING IN VENETIAN CRETE":** Onassis Cultural Center, 645 Fifth Ave., at 51st St. 212-486-4448. Through Feb. 27.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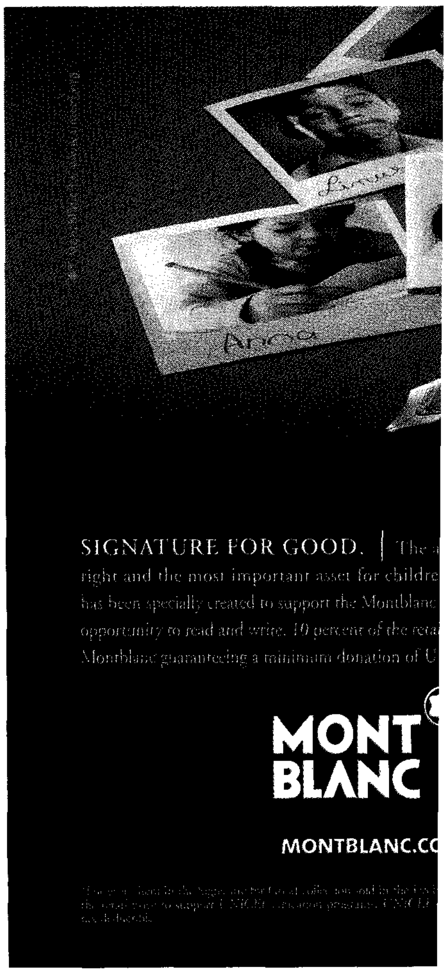
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GALLERIES—CHELSEA

ALIGHIERO E BOETTI
A grandly scaled retrospective of the Italian conceptualist's world maps, woven and embroidered by Afghan women in Pakistan between 1971 and his death, in 1994, should be beautiful. It isn't. Although the maps are sumptuous in texture and certainly colorful, identifying each country with its national flag, a disheartening clangor prevails. The work may make a point about the absurdity of nationalism, but that thought—any thought, really—is hard to square with the conspicuous waste of so much skilled craft. Through Jan. 23. (Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606.)

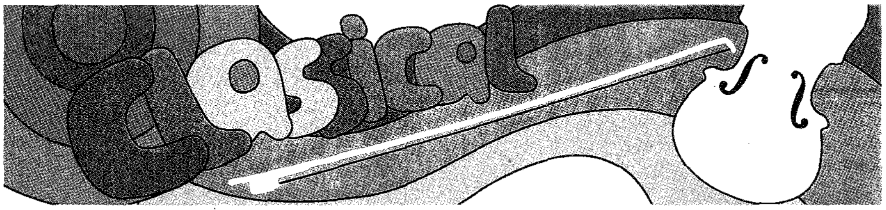
NICOLE EISENMAN
Bohemian art-colony Expressionism redux. Unwashed fun! Eisenman's nutty epicureans drink and dally in cunningly slovenly paintings. Two female lovers loll atop a woven mat on what might be a beach (though it looks like a starry sky), with beer, Vitamin Water, and cigarettes near at hand. A stack of books is a bibliography of painterly romance: Ernst, Doig, Byzantium, Kirchner, Picasso, Brueghel, a Sotheby's catalogue, Vuillard, Bellmer, Munch, Nolde, Nicola Tyson, Matisse, Henri Rousseau, Goya, and Japonisme. The couple's volumes of van Gogh and Beckmann must be out on loan. Through Dec. 23. (Koenig, 545 W. 23rd St. 212-334-9255.)

TOUHAMI ENNADRE
The Moroccan-born French photographer has been spending time in New York, where he shot these knockout night-life images. A number of them were taken in dance or sex clubs, typically of isolated couples nuzzling in the dark. But the bulk of the show is devoted to pictures of homeless people sleeping in cocoons of clothing that leave nothing uncovered. As he's done throughout his work, Ennadre emphasizes the shapes of these bundled bodies by masking out the backgrounds in the printing process, allowing the figures to float in pitch-black space. Are the pictures too elegant for their own good? Only if you choose to forget that there are desperate people wrapped inside the found sculptures. Through Jan. 2. (Juschka, 547 W. 27th St. 212-244-4320.)

LUKE SMALLEY
The photographer, who died earlier this year, at the age of fifty-three, conceived this body of work as a loose narrative involving three attractive young women whose boyfriends are in prison. Since Smalley is known primarily for pictures of athletic young men posed in the style of vintage exercise manuals, it will come as no surprise that the boyfriends absorb most of his attention. All the photographs find a nice balance between naturalism and artifice, but the images of men pack a lot more heat. Whether lazing on bunk beds, picking up laundry, or getting tattooed, the guys (all of whom look more like Bruce Weber models than like convicts) play out a homoerotic fantasy that the women have no real part in. Through Dec. 19. (ClampArt, 521-531 W. 25th St. 646-230-0020.)

Short List

LYNDA BENGLIS: Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7727. Through Dec. 19. **WALLACE BERMAN:** Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 212-243-3335. Through Jan. 9. **ROZ CHAST:** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Jan. 9. **MOYRA DAVEY:** Murray Guy, 453 W. 17th St. 212-463-7372. Through Dec. 24. **BRUCE DAVIDSON:** Wolkowitz, 505 W. 24th St. 212-243-8830. Through Dec. 19. **CARROLL DUNHAM:** Gladstone, 515 W. 24th St. 212-206-9300. Through Dec. 5. **DAN FLAVIN:** Zwirner, 525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070. Through Dec. 23. **WALTON FORD:** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 212-



KARI MODEN

CLASSICAL NOTES
NEW-TIME RELIGION

Until the crisis of modernism blew up the bridge that connected classical music and middle-class taste, a composer was expected to have a modicum of religious music in his catalogue; even the agnostic Brahms had his motets and Serious Songs. In contemporary America, most religious music—competent, predictable—is produced by the masters of the "choral market." But recent recordings from two composers offer wondrous examples of another aesthetic—a deeply personal subjectivity brought to hallowed musical forms.

Both composers are former enfants terribles of the downtown scene, now in middle age. David Lang has previously collaborated with his fellow Bang on a Can composers Michael Gordon and Julia Wolfe in music exploring their common Jewish heritage. But in **"The Little Match Girl Passion"** (reverently performed by Paul Hillier's Theatre of Voices, on Harmonia Mundi), which won the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2008, he uses Bach's St. Matthew Passion as a model in musicalizing Hans Christian Andersen's parable of a poor girl who freezes to death on a city street on New Year's Eve. The work embraces its poverty of means: the four singers make occasional contributions on drums and bells, and the little chapters of the tale are intoned in tiny sequences of upward-moving scales. But, in the emotionally charged, chorale-like interludes, Lang, like Bach, allows us to acknowledge and respond to the girl's suffering; it is this unsettling alternation of styles that makes the work a masterpiece.

Phil Kline, a child of devout Pennsylvania Dutch Lutherans who earned his stripes touring in Glenn Branca's earsplitting guitar ensembles, has brought a fulsome eclecticism to **"John the Revelator"** (Cantaloupe), a Mass that mixes the familiar liturgical passages with fragments of the Old Testament and texts by David Shapiro and Samuel Beckett. Eerily harmonized versions of early American hymns frame the work, with the interior movements drinking deeply of the styles of Messiaen, Eastern Orthodox chant, and rugged, rock-inflected minimalism. The performers, the male chorus Lionheart and the string quartet Ethel, are world class, but the effect is peculiarly American—both simple and complex, crude and sublime. Kline worships music at a church of his own making.

—*Russell Platt*

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DEC 2, 5 mat

Les Contes d'Hoffmann NEW PRODUCTION
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DEC 10, 15, 18, 22, 26 mat, 29

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563-4474. Through Dec. 23. **DAVID HOCKNEY:** PaceWildenstein, 534 W. 25th St. 212-929-7000. Through Dec. 24. **SISTER CORITA KENT:** Feuer, 530 W. 24th St. 212-989-7700. Through Dec. 5. **SYLVIA SLEIGH:** I-20, at 557 W. 23rd St. 212-645-1100. Through Dec. 31. **"BESIDES, WITH, AGAINST, AND YET: ABSTRACTION AND THE READYMADE GESTURE":** The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793, ext. 11. Through Jan. 16. **"ON TOP OF THE WHALE":** Algus, 511 W. 25th St. 212-242-6242. Through Dec. 5.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

ERIN SHIRREFF
The young sculptor traffics in history's shadow and in sleight of hand. Two videos are convincing as Apollo-era shots of full moons, but they actually document a plaster model in the artist's studio. A row of black-and-white photographs suggest evidence of inscrutable relics (with a nod to Brassaï's "Sculptures Involuntaires"); the fragments, like the moon, are handmade. The pièce de résistance is slow-moving footage of James Turrell's "Roden Crater" (an earthwork in progress since 1980) made by rephotographing the same image hundreds of times, to counterfeit shifting climate and light. Forget if it sounds academic or derivative; just go and let the magic win out. Through Dec. 20. (Cooley, 34 Orchard St. 212-680-0564.)

Short List

KRISTIN BAKER: Deitch, 18 Wooster St. 212-343-7300. Through Dec. 19. **MARCEL BROODTHAERS:** Freeman, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-966-5154. Through Dec. 23. **KRYSTEN CUNNINGHAM:** Dispatch, 127 Henry St. 212-227-2783. Through Dec. 13. **LEE FRIEDLANDER:** Borden, 560 Broadway, at Prince St. 212-431-0166. Through Dec. 30. **ERIK HANSON:** Sunday L.E.S., 237 Eldridge St. 212-253-0700. Through Dec. 31. **VOLKER HUELLER:** Eleven Rivington, 11 Rivington St. 212-982-1930. Through Jan. 8. **"FROTTAGE":** Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774. Through Jan. 23. **"STUART SHERMAN: NOTHING UP MY SLEEVE":** Participant, Inc., 253 E. Houston St. 212-254-4334. Through Dec. 20.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
Balanchine's staging of "The Nutcracker" has been entertaining and delighting children (and adults) since its première, in 1954. It has also been a testing ground for young dancers in many featured roles, from Candy Cane to Sugarplum Fairy. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-721-6500. Dec. 1-3 and Dec. 8 at 6, Dec. 4 at 8, Dec. 5 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 6 at 1 and 5. Through Jan. 3.)

BALLET HISPANICO
Three programs at the Joyce shuffle premières by Andrea Miller and Ron De Jesús among revivals of "Goodnight Paradise" (1994) and "Batucada Fantástica" (1982), along with the good-time favorite "Club Havana" (2000). (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 1-2 and Dec. 8 at 7:30, Dec. 3-4 at 8, Dec. 5 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 6 at 2 and 7:30. Through Dec. 13.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE
December is Ailey Month at City Center, which means that it's also Judith Jamison Month. That's especially true this year, as the titaness celebrates two decades as the company's artistic director. As a figurehead and a fund-raiser, she's been a champ, but less so as a choreographer. Nevertheless, the first week's première is hers, "Among Us (Private Spaces: Public Places)," a character ballet in vignettes, set to a score by the fine jazz pianist Eric Lewis. Jamison is likely to be better honored later in the season, with a tribute dance from the best choreographer she's sponsored, Ronald K. Brown. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 2 and Dec. 8 at 7, Dec. 3-4 at 8, Dec. 5 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 6 at 3 and 7:30. Through Jan. 3.)

"NUTCRACKER IN THE LOWER"
Are all the candy canes and angels getting you down? Urban Ballet Theatre offers an alternative, multicultural "Nutcracker," set in a Lower East Side housing project, with krumping rats, fan-dancing, and salsa-laced revelry. (Abrons Arts Center, 466 Grand St. 212-352-3101. Dec. 2-4 at 7:30 and Dec. 5 at 3 and 7:30.)

MOVEMENT RESEARCH FALL FESTIVAL
This installment of Movement Research's twice-yearly festival is curated by Charles Atlas, the veteran filmmaker and frequent Merce Cunningham collaborator, and Lucy Sexton, a mainstay of the downtown scene for more than two decades. The focus is on the politics of dance, with workshops and performances by artists including Douglas Dunn, Yvonne Meier, Layard Thompson, Ishmael Houston-Jones, and Anne Iobst. For a complete schedule, visit www.movementresearch.org. (Various locations. 212-598-0551. Dec. 2 at 9 and Dec. 3-5 at 8.)

"THE BARNARD PROJECT"
Dance Theatre Workshop's joint venture with Barnard gives downtown choreographers residencies at the university, exposing Barnard students to the world of experimental dance and offering the dancemakers such uncommon luxuries as time, space, and a large pool of dancers; the resulting work is performed at D.T.W. The senior partners this semester range from relative newcomers like Juliana May (who founded her company, MAYDance, in 2002) to Vicky Shick, a creator of pure dance poetry who began her career in the seventies and was a longtime member of the Trisha Brown company. (219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 3-4 at 7:30 and Dec. 5 at 2 and 7:30.)

JEREMY WADE
Thinking outside the box, Japan Society has commissioned a piece from Wade, who made a name for himself a few years back as a raver who worked up dances plumbing extreme states. The subject of "There Is No End to More" is *kawaii* culture, the Japanese kitsch of cute; the aim is both the underbelly and the disturbing overtones. Hiroki Otsuka, known for his sexualized manga, supplies the appropriate imagery, animated by the video artist Veith Michel. A voice-over, sinisterly whispered by an adult male, cleverly mimics the non-sequitur narrative and the whiplash attitudes of an anime heroine, as the actor-dancer Jared Gradinger does something like robot mime, connected to the story only by its emotional tone. Whatever is impelling his pelvic thrusts turns manic as he morphs into the host of a children's TV show. (333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258. Dec. 3-5 at 7:30.)

DANIEL CLIFTON / MEI-YIN NG
Dance New Amsterdam presents a double bill of artists-in-residence. Clifton, whose dark presence has charged recent productions by Martha Clarke and Tere O'Connor, is also a punk guitarist, and his anecdote-based choreography meshes with his musical compositions. His new piece "Dust" tracks the passage of time with real and imagined memories. Ng and her MEI-BE WHATever ensemble study the relationship between the body and technology, juxtaposing live performance with real-time video. "Mentallic (Mental + Metallic)" applies this technique to a fitting subject: phantom-limb syndrome. (280 Broadway, at Chambers St. 212-625-8369. Dec. 3-5 at 8 and Dec. 6 at 3.)

"FRIDAYS AT NOON: ARTISTS WITH A TWIST"
Four female choreographers at different stages in their careers—Marya Wethers, Barbara Mahler, Marta Renzi, and Rebecca Stenn—present new works. Highlights include Wethers's imagery of women as warriors in her work-in-progress "TARGET::furnace" and Mahler's riffs on familiar tunes from "Fiddler on the Roof" and the Patti Page songbook. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 4 at noon.)

"CHESTNUTS ROASTING ON THE FLAMING IDIOTS"
Even jugglers get comeback tours. Having disbanded in 2004, the Flaming Idiots—Gyro, Pyro, and Walter—reunite for this holiday show. To such signature antics as juggling machetes and beanbag chairs, the

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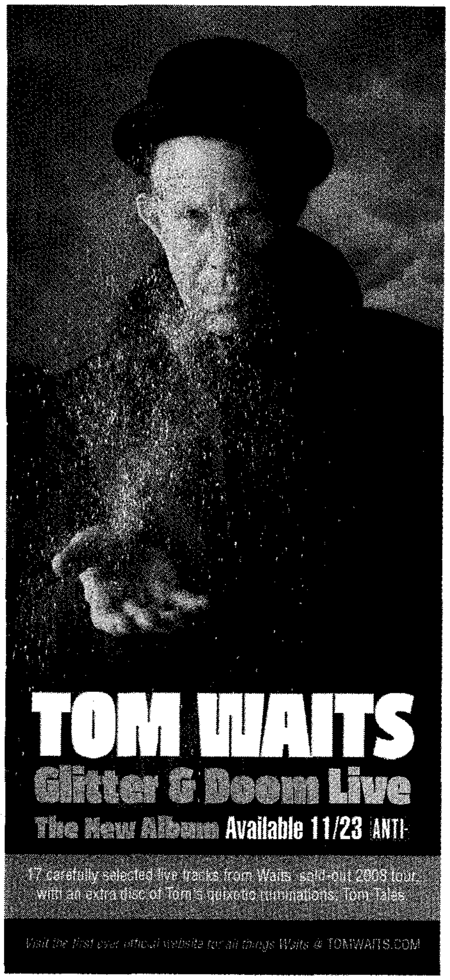

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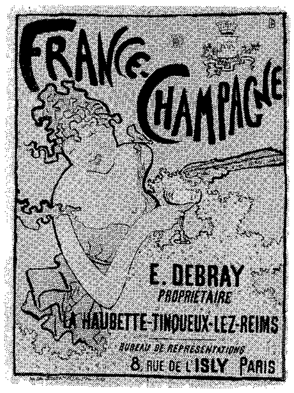

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zany trio adds holiday-themed stunts such as juggling nine lit torches, in honor of Hanukkah. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 646-223-3010. Dec. 4 at 7 and Dec. 5 at 2 and 7. Through Jan. 3.)

THE DASH ENSEMBLE / "SUNDOWNING"
Gregory Dolbashian, a powerful and expressive dancer who made his mark as a member of CorbinDances, brings his own small contemporary company to the Joyce SoHo, where it will perform his latest evening-length work, "Sundowning," a meditation on altered states of mind. (155 Mercer St. 212-352-3101. Dec. 4-5 at 8 and Dec. 6 at 3.)

"THE NUTCRACKER"
Valentina Kozlova, a former Bolshoi ballerina, presents her annual gender-bending "Nutcracker," in which Clara's doll-making godfather, Herr Drosselmeyer (Margo Sappington), becomes a magic-trick-playing auntie. Charmingly, some of the boys' roles are also played by girls, not for artistic reasons but for want of male pupils. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-545-7536. Dec. 5 at 4 and 8.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
After Luc Bondy's limp staging of "Tosca" flopped on opening night, the Met needed a solid hit, and it has one with Patrice Chéreau's riveting yet humane production of **"From the House of the Dead,"** Janáček's towering final opera, a free adaptation of Dostoyevsky's prison-camp novel. Willard White, Peter Mattei, and Kurt Streit are but three of the standouts in the committed ensemble cast; Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts with streamlined intensity. (Dec. 2 at 8 and Dec. 5 at 1. These are the final performances.) ♦ James Levine is scheduled to conduct the first performances of a new production of Offenbach's **"Les Contes d'Hoffmann"** by Bartlett Sher, whose recent staging of "The Barber of Seville" has proved to be a house favorite. (The work of Kafka is reportedly an inspiration for his latest effort.) After many high-profile replacements, the cast has settled—Joseph Calleja in the title role; Kate Lindsey singing the part of Nicklausse; Anna Netrebko, Kathleen Kim, and Ekaterina Gubanova in the soprano leads; and Alan Held as the four villains. (Dec. 3 and Dec. 7 at 8.) ♦ The excellent Fabio Luisi conducts **"Le Nozze di Figaro,"** featuring a vibrant young cast that includes Annette Dasch, Danielle de Niese, Isabel Leonard, Ludovic Tézier, and Luca Pisaroni in the leading roles. (Dec. 4 and Dec. 8 at 8. Angela Meade replaces Dasch in the first performance.) ♦ Jack O'Brien's winning production of Puccini's **"Il Trittico,"** with Patricia Racette, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stephanie Blythe, and Alessandro Corbelli; Stefano Ranzani. (Dec. 5 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

SYMPHONY SPACE:
LA SCALA OPENING NIGHT
The Met is not the only company to invest in HD. Symphony Space gets into the act this week, offering a live satellite transmission of the Milan theatre's opening-night performance of **"Carmen,"** with Jonas Kaufmann, Erwin Schrott, Anita Rachvelishvili, and Adriana Damato; Daniel Barenboim conducts. (Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Dec. 7 at noon. Note: An encore performance will be shown at 7:30.)

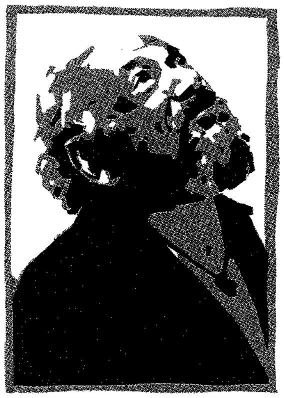
ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
Esa-Pekka Salonen, still busy conducting Patrice Chéreau's stunning production of Janáček's "From the House of the Dead" at the Met, makes time to lead the Philharmonic in music by three more twentieth-century masters: Bartók's "Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta," Ravel's Piano Concerto in G Major (with David Fray), and Debussy's "La Mer." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 3 and Dec. 8 at 7:30, Dec. 4 at 11 A.M., and Dec. 5 at 8.)

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
ROUGH MAGIC

Of the reams of argumentative modernist music that circulated through American universities after the Second World War, most is destined to gather dust on the same library shelves that contain the bustling Brahmsian symphonies and tidy Stravinskyan concertinos of previous generations. Ralph Shapey, the craggy Chicago composer who lived from 1921 to 2002, deserves a different fate, and a recent "Composer Portrait" concert at Miller Theatre, organized by the violinist Miranda Cuckson, showed why. A piece like "Three for Six," for six chamber players, is a feat of musical sculpture: lean melodies lunge through space, rhythms tangle muscularly, sound takes on mass and motion. Shapey is unafraid of repetition, meaning that disjunct atonal figures assume an iconic familiarity. And he resists the academic urge to fill the page with notes in pursuit of an ersatz complexity; the writing is always radically clear. The Shapey recording of choice is the anthology "Radical Traditionalism," on the New World label.

—*Alex Ross*



JEROEN KOOLHAAS

SINFONIETTA OF RIVERDALE: "MAESTRI"
As gentrification has flowed northward from “upstate Manhattan” into Marble Hill and the Bronx, high culture has followed suit. The young conductor Mark Mandarano’s newly established chamber orchestra offers music by two famed composer-conductors: Esa-Pekka Salonen’s “Mania” and Gustav Mahler’s “Song of the Earth” (in Schoenberg’s intimate arrangement, with the mezzo-soprano Theodora Hanslowe and the tenor Andrew Drost). (Riverdale Temple, Independence Ave. at 246th St. www.sinfoniettanyc.org. Dec. 6 at 2:30.)

THE KNIGHTS
The dynamic Brooklyn chamber orchestra likes to roam, but it stays close to home for a concert in the Brooklyn Friends of Chamber Music series. Music by Mozart and Stravinsky (the “Dumbarton Oaks” Concerto) anchors a program that also features a recent work by Kevin Beavers, “Roscoe,” based on a text by William Kennedy (with the violinist Colin Jacobsen, and narrated by Justice Gustin L. Reichbach); Eric Jacobsen conducts. (Church of St. Ann and the Holy Trinity, Clinton St. at Montague St. Dec. 6 at 3. Tickets at the door.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA
James DePreist leads the school’s premier ensemble in music by Berlioz, Prokofiev (the Violin Concerto No. 1 in D Major, with Sean Lee), and Bartók (the Concerto for Orchestra). (Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 7 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 212-769-7406.)

RECITALS

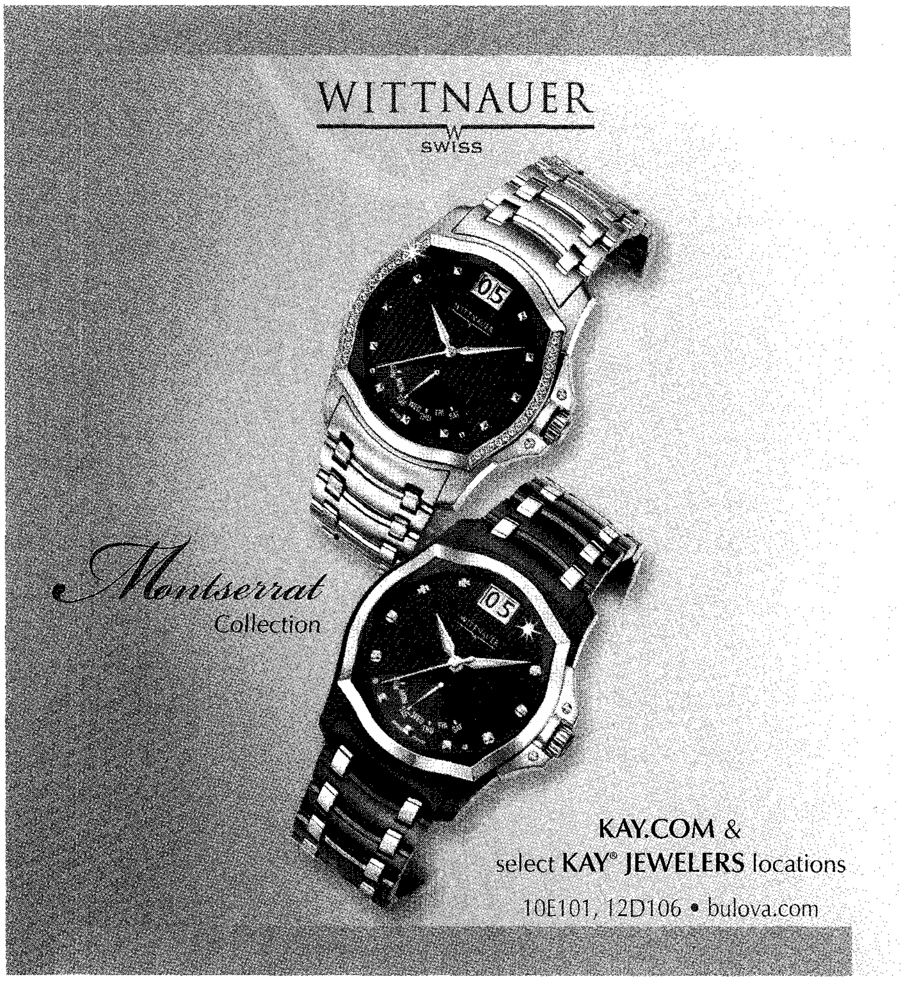
HILLIARD ENSEMBLE AND ARDITTI QUARTET
Intriguing matchups of groups specializing in early and contemporary music have been featured in Carnegie Hall’s programming this fall. At Zankel Hall, the Hilliard Ensemble of vocalists joins the avant-gardists of the Arditti to perform the U.S. première of “ET LUX,” a very personal exploration of the Requiem Mass by the ardent German Romantic modernist Wolfgang Rihm. (212-247-7800. Dec. 2 at 7:30.)

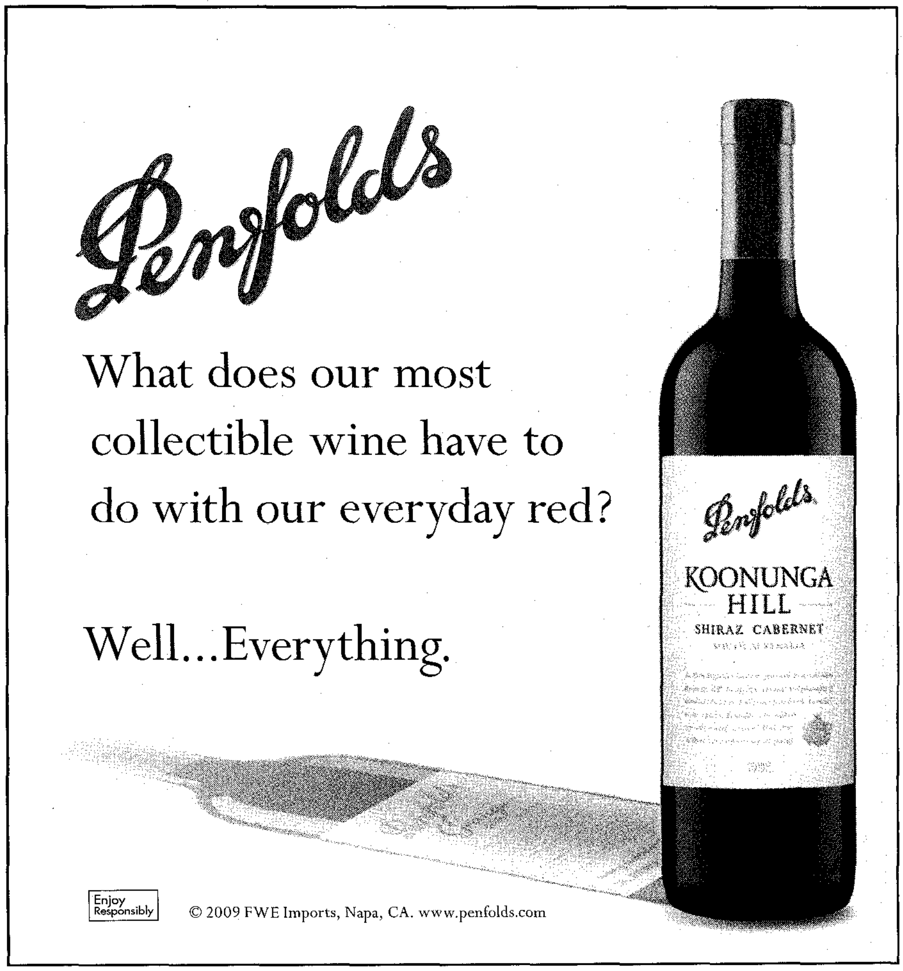
"TERRA NOVA: SINFONIA ANTARCTICA"
Inspired by Ralph Vaughan Williams’s film-score symphony, the turntable artist DJ Spooky has concocted, with the director Bob McGrath, a modern-day riposte, a multimedia piece (employing sampling and video projections) that uses actual sounds that the composer recorded in the region—a portrait of a continent under environmental threat. Performed with members of the International Contemporary Ensemble. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 2 and Dec. 4-5 at 7:30.)

"FOUR QUARTETS"
This month, Lincoln Center’s classical-music productions boldly blend performance with theatre and multimedia. The first of these is offered off-site, at the Baryshnikov Arts Center—an importation of London’s Donmar Warehouse production by the director Katie Mitchell, in which the actor Stephen Dillane gives a dramatic reading of T. S. Eliot’s celebrated cycle of poems, backed by music from the formidable Miró Quartet. (450 W. 37th St. 212-721-6500. Dec. 2-3 at 8.)

MENDELSSOHN STRING QUARTET
The admired New York group launches a concert at Carnegie’s Weill Recital Hall with music by its namesake (the Quartet in A Minor, Op. 13) before moving on to quartets by Bartók and Beethoven (in A Minor, Op. 132). (212-247-7800. Dec. 3 at 7:30.)

CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER
December is Baroque month at Alice Tully Hall. Dec. 4 at 7:30 and Dec. 6 at 5: The soprano Dominique Labelle is the special guest in “The Baroque Collection,” a concert offering works by Biber, Corelli, Bach (the Cantata BWV 209, “Non sa che sia dolore”), Purcell, Geminiani (the Concerto Grosso in D Minor, “La Follia”), and Vivaldi; assisting are the violist Paul Neubauer, the bassist Kurt Muroki, and the flutist Tara Helen O’Connor, among others. ♦ Dec. 8 at 7:30: The classical-recorder field may be small, but the Danish virtuoso Michala Petri has dominated it for three decades. With her husband, the lutenist Lars Hanni-

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bal, she joins several members and guests of the Society (including the violinists Cho-Liang Lin and Amy Lee and the bassoonist Peter Kolkay) to perform a clutch of sonatas and concertos by Bach, Vivaldi, Tartini, Sammartini, and Telemann. (212-875-5788.)

DOROTHEA RÖSCHMANN
Malcolm Martineau, one of the most reliable accompanists around, joins the Met soprano, a scrupulous artist with a luxuriant voice, in a surfeit of German lieder—two cycles by Schumann ("Frauenliebe und -leben" and "Gedichte der Königin Maria Stuart"), plus songs by Mahler and Wolf. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 5 at 7:30.)

EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK
Frederick Renz's ensemble, a Gotham mainstay for thirty-five years, offers the first of five performances of "A Renaissance Christmas," a program of carols, motets, and noels, presented at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. 212-280-0330. Dec. 5 at 8.)

Armenian heritage in works by Mansurian and the father of Armenian music, Gomidas Vardabet. (158 Bleecker St. www.lprnyc.com. Dec. 6 at 9:30.)

MOVIES OPENING

BIG RIVER MAN
A documentary, directed by John Maringouin, about Martin Strel, an endurance swimmer from Slovenia who attempts to swim the length of the Amazon. Opening Dec. 4. (In limited release.)

BROTHERS
A young man comforts the wife and children of his older brother, who has gone missing in Afghanistan. Starring Jake Gyllenhaal, Natalie Portman, and Tobey Maguire. Directed by Jim Sheridan. Opening Dec. 4. (In wide release.)

TABLES FOR TWO
THE VANDERBILT

570 Vanderbilt Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-0570)—The name of this new Prospect Heights restaurant implies synonymy with its neighborhood, which, when you are opening up not far from several well-established joints, could easily misfire. Luckily, the co-owner Saul Bolton is a longtime presence in Brooklyn, possessor of one of the borough's four Michelin-starred eateries, so the feeling as the Vanderbilt took shape in the course of several months was mostly one of eager anticipation. (At least one resident took a dim view, however, complaining online that the new place's menu concept—small plates—was cribbing from Beast, the tapas spot across the street: "Personally I like to support the original believers in Prospect Heights.")

The Vanderbilt departs from the homey, carefully worn aesthetic that generally prevails on this strip; the feeling is sleekly industrial and spacious. The long room encompasses a sizable bar area, with vertiginously high stools, stainless-steel light fixtures, and exposed pipes; an open kitchen, with seats at a marble counter where diners can look over the shoulders of the cooks; and a dining room of wood-panelled walls, wooden tables, and hardwood floors. Floor-to-ceiling windows make the street scene as much a part of the décor as the paisley upholstery.

Bolton and his partner, Ben Daitz, who also runs the Cambodian sandwich shop Num Pang, have given the menu an Asian inflection, and the best dish might be the roasted Brussels sprouts, dressed with sriracha, lime, and honey, each bite a perfect combination of sweet, spicy, and tart. Eating the blistered shishito peppers, on the other hand, was like playing Russian roulette—some were mildly flavorful, others nearly took your tongue off. A more consistent conduit of heat were the Oreilles de Christ: ear-shaped pieces of fried pig's skin, served with pipettes of pique (a sauce of vinegar, habaneros, fresh pineapple, and cilantro) for accurate seasoning. There was rich charcuterie, including the duck rillets, which offered fatty, smoky respite; *boudin blanc*, with the thick, rough-hewn appearance of the homemade, had no lack of flavor, or of salt. And the spicy fried chicken wings, a refined version of the bar classic (though still messy), combined perfectly tender meat, a slick of sharp sauce, and a scattering of sesame seeds. Yet, for all the focus on the food, little lacunae in service grated. Plates onto which you served yourself were never changed, muddling the flavors; everything came out in a rush, giving the meal a race-to-the-finish feel. A server brought out a dish of warm doughnuts and, although she was kind enough to tell a diner with a nut allergy that she thought they were made with almond flour, she was inconsiderate enough not to offer the chance to reorder. Still, it was hard to let irritation cloud the fact that those doughnuts, surrounded by a moat of brandied cherries, were light, fluffy, and delicious. (Open daily for dinner. Dishes $4-$16.)

—*Andrea Thompson*

LIONHEART
The Cloisters, upper Manhattan's authentically medieval venue, is an evocative space for Christmas concerts. The superb male choral ensemble begins the seasonal schedule with "Il Laudario di Cortona: Christmas in Medieval Italy," a program of joyful polyphony. (Fort Tryon Park. 212-650-2290. Dec. 6 at 1 and 3.)

MET CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
James Levine's band of orchestral virtuosos (with the soprano Jo Ellen Miller) dives into a concert pairing music by Mozart (the Divertimento in B-Flat Major, K. 287) and Pierre Boulez (including "Dérive 1" and "Improvisation sur Mallarmé" I and II). (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 6 at 5.)

(LE) POISSON ROUGE: TRIO HAYREN
One of the great violists of our time—Kim Kashkashian—teams up with the pianist Tigran Mansurian (also a major composer) and the percussionist Robyn Schulkowsky to explore the music of her

EVERYBODY'S FINE
In this remake of an Italian film, a widower (Robert De Niro) sets off on an impromptu road trip to reunite with his grown children. Directed by Kirk Jones. Opening Dec. 4. (In wide release.)

THE LAST STATION
A drama, directed by Michael Hoffman, about the elderly Leo Tolstoy (Christopher Plummer), his wife (Helen Mirren), and his disciple (Paul Giamatti). Opening Dec. 4. (In wide release.)

LOOT
Darius Marder directed this documentary, about the discovery of troves of goods stolen during the Second World War. Opening Dec. 4. (IFC Center.)

UNTIL THE LIGHT TAKES US
A documentary chronicling the history of Norwegian black-metal music. Directed by Aaron Aites and Audrey Ewell. Opening Dec. 4. (Cinema Village.)

UP IN THE AIR
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Dec. 4. (In wide release.)

JESSIE WENDER

NOW PLAYING

BAD LIEUTENANT: PORT OF CALL NEW ORLEANS

Snakes, in their sinister side-to-side way, swim through floodwaters, menacing a man held in an underground jail; alligators climb onto the freeway, causing automobiles to smash into one another; iguanas lounge on coffee tables, turning their loathsome eyes on the humans standing around them. In brief, Werner Herzog has checked into New Orleans and metaphysical despair is loosed upon Bourbon Street. It's a police procedural, sort of. A local drug kingpin is killing African-born interlopers in the white-powder trade; Detective Terence McDonagh (Nicolas Cage) tries to stop him while grabbing as much cocaine for himself as he can. Cage, his face screwed up with rage, one shoulder hitched higher than the other from a back injury, looks like Quasimodo without a bell rope to hang on to. Herzog has no interest in telling a story straight, and he lets his star run wild. The result is a mess, but it's far from boring. With Eva Mendes and Val Kilmer, who seem to be in another picture. Loosely based on Abel Ferrara's "Bad Lieutenant," from 1992, which Herzog denies ever having seen.—*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/30/09.) (In wide release.)

THE BLIND SIDE

The director and screenwriter John Lee Hancock's adaptation of Michael Lewis's nonfiction book is a multimillion-dollar cheeseburger—hard to resist, savory, comforting, and fundamentally unwholesome. The story, which takes place in Memphis, Tennessee, concerns the transformation of Michael Oher, a black teen-ager whose mother was a crack addict, from a street kid to an All-American college football player, thanks to the intervention of the wealthy white Tuohy family. Sandra Bullock gleefully tears into the role of Leigh Anne Tuohy, the fierce, salty, flamboyant young matriarch who takes Michael into her home and her family and becomes both his protector and his mentor, and Quintin Aaron brings a calm grace to the role of Michael. The movie is done with crispness, vigor, down-home humor, and an overall tang of good feeling, but the pushing of buttons is extraordinarily calculated. Michael and the Tuohys come off as paragons of virtue, and the bad guys—from indifferent teachers and predatory drug dealers to country-club ladies and unevolved country folk—are situated safely outside and clearly labelled. There's a lot of "redneck"-baiting here, all done by conservative Christian Republicans (the team Michael plays for is even called the Crusaders). Hancock's extremely selective view of Southern life offers a vision of anti-racism devoid of liberalism and presents young Michael as a living tabula rasa on which to project Tuohy-family values.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

BROKEN EMBRACES

The new Pedro Almodóvar film is a complicated business, with stories built inside one another and subplots leading off in furtive directions, like tunnels. We meet Harry Caine (Lluís Homar), a blind screenwriter and former director, who, when he is not undressing strangers in his apartment, is concocting screenplays with his assistant, Diego (Tamar Novas), or revisiting and recutting a movie that was taken out of his hands many years before. Much of the action is set in that time—the chronicle of a love affair between the director and his star (Penélope Cruz), the mistress of a jealous financier (José Luis Gómez). The two periods intersect, as so often in Almodóvar, via parents and children; Diego's mother and the financier's pushy son, it turns out, both have a substantial role to play. The clarity and sheen of the film are typically startling, and no living director is more expert in the weaving of matching details; this time, however, the lusts and disappointments of the characters come close to being smothered—and rendered strangely unmoving—by the surfeit of cleverness and cool. In Spanish.—*Anthony Lane* (11/23/09) (In wide release.)

THE CHEAT

Cecil B. De Mille's viperish 1915 melodrama concerns a society lady (Fannie Ward) who borrows money from a Japanese roué (Sessue Hayakawa) and promises to repay him with sex. When she fails to deliver, he takes revenge with a hot branding iron; she shoots and wounds him, resulting in a tabloid scandal. De Mille's ethnic prejudice is unambiguous. His stark technique is short on psychology and lyricism, and he seems interested mainly in depravity and crowds—the movie comes to life only when evil is done and when large groups command the screen. The swarm of swells at a charity picnic suggests the uniform—and ethnically pure—social order that the Asian interloper disturbs, and a climactic courtroom riot, in which a mob's outburst overrides the law and tilts the scales of justice, sets up (doubtless unwittingly) a prototype of Fascist cinema. Silent.—*R.B.* (MOMA; Dec. 2-4.)

CRIES AND WHISPERS

Ingmar Bergman's dream play is set in a manor house at the turn of the century where a spinster in her late thirties (Harriet Andersson) is dying. Her two sisters (Ingrid Thulin and Liv Ullmann) have come to attend her, and they watch and wait, along with a peasant servant (Kari Sylwan). The movie is built out of a series of emotionally charged images that express inner stress, and Bergman handles them with the fluidity of a master. Superbly photographed by Sven Nykvist in a style suggesting Edvard Munch, and with blood-red backgrounds, the film is smooth and hypnotic; it has oracular power and the pull of a dream. Yet there's a nineteenth-century dullness at the heart of it. Each sister represents a different aspect of woman—woman viewed as the Other—and the film mingles didacticism with erotic mystery. In Swedish. Released in 1972.—*Pauline Kael* (BAM; Dec. 5.)

DON'T LOOK BACK

If you know Bob Dylan primarily as the avuncular, weedy troubadour he has become in recent years, then D. A. Pennebaker's 1967 black-and-white documentary of Dylan's 1965 British tour will come as a shock. Already a folk icon and about to become a rock star, Dylan cuts through mid-sixties England like a knife: he is dismissive of reporters (who are, to be fair, dismissive of him), lordly with his inner circle (which includes his lover at the time, Joan Baez), and downright truculent with competitors (the scene in which he débuts "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue" for a clearly outclassed Donovan verges on assault). Look for brief glimpses of luminaries like Allen Ginsberg and Marianne Faithfull, enjoy the "Subterranean Homesick Blues" cue-card sequence, and suffer through the sometimes interminable backstage patter as you wait for the film's true highlights: the onstage performances of early Dylan classics and the impromptu hotel-room takes on two Hank Williams songs, "Lost Highway" and "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry."—*Ben Greenman* (IFC Center; Dec. 4-6.)

FANTASTIC MR. FOX

For his stop-motion adaptation of Roald Dahl's book—about a fox who steals from three grotesque farmers, who go to absurd lengths to capture him as he leads his family and friends on increasingly desperate adventures in order to survive—the director Wes Anderson, co-writing the script with Noah Baumbach, greatly amplified the story and its emotional spectrum. Mr. and Mrs. Fox (voiced by George Clooney and Meryl Streep)—he's a journalist, she's an artist—bring to life a view of marriage that's as bittersweet and insightful as that of any recent live-action movie, and their idiosyncratic son (Jason Schwartzman) is set up in a touching rivalry with his cousin (Eric Anderson, the director's brother). Visually, the movie is a wonder, with its profusion of detail and exquisitely focussed "performances" by the figurines, whom Anderson frames in images as precisely composed as those featuring actors in his live-action work. The voice performances are sparkling and apt; the adventure plot is realized with a scenographic splendor that's as understated as it is dazzling, and is also invested with a surprising moral

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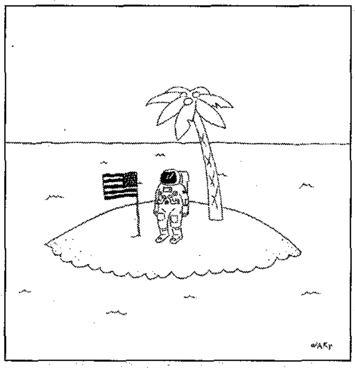

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weight. Though the emotional realms—and the philosophical twists—that Anderson evokes are unusually sophisticated for a children's film, its exuberance is a universal tonic.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE IRON GIANT

The director Brad Bird ("The Incredibles," "Ratatouille") fills the CinemaScope screen with wit and beauty in this modern fairy tale from 1999, about a huge robot from outer space who washes up on the shores of a town called Rockwell, Maine, in 1957 and befriends a youngster named Hogarth Hughes. Bird and his collaborators take an odd, elegiac fable by the late British poet Ted Hughes and turn it into a piquant variation on the best of all fish-out-of-water films, "E.T." The beguiling visuals meld a computer-generated giant with humans who are drawn in an angular, caricature-like style that's a lot bolder than that of most animated films; the ticklish period touches include a crawling-brain movie glimpsed on late-night TV and the beatnik stylings of a scrap collector and artist named Dean. The movie provides a master class in the use of scale and perspective—and in its power to open up a viewer's heart and mind.—*Michael Sragow* (MOMA; Dec. 3.)

THE MAN WHO LOVED WOMEN

François Truffaut's bittersweet 1977 comedy, about the pleasure and pathos of sexual pursuit, is also an ode to the art of writing. The film's title is that of a memoir written by the protagonist, Bertrand Morane (Charles Denner), an engineer in provincial Montpellier who spends all his free time chasing women (sometimes literally), until, after an unexpected rejection, he is moved to type out the reminiscences inspired by a drawerful of old photographs and billets-doux—as well as those of his mother's many affairs and her indifference toward him. Despite being played by fine actors (including Brigitte Fossey, Leslie Caron, and Nelly Borgeaud), the women Bertrand "loved" remain ciphers, collections of attributes surrounding elusive personae and bodies—seemingly by design. The erotic egotist is writing about himself and his passions, relying on women to reflect different facets of his own identity. Like Bertrand, Truffaut pays homage to old-school formalities, constraints, and styles, both social and sartorial (the film dwells obsessively on elaborate lingerie, skirts and dresses worn not too short, and the rustle of silk stockings). His reticence about sex mirrors Bertrand's, and both come off as rear-guard warriors against the sexual revolution—against the banalization of their epicurean delights. In French.—*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; Dec. 8.)

ME AND ORSON WELLES

A vivid view of Orson Welles (Christian McKay) at twenty-two, as seen through the eyes of a cocky teenager (Zac Efron) from New Jersey who bluffs his way into Welles's Mercury Theatre group in 1937. The plot is conventional: the young man gets initiated into sex and the many other fascinating and complicated rights of the grownup world—that is, he gets warmed up and then burned by people more experienced and ruthless than he is. But the details of the production that Welles stages (a modern-dress "Julius Caesar") are fascinating, and at the center of it stands the seductive and bombastic young genius, who applies his superlative theatrical instincts to an old classic. The British actor McKay has the necessary stature and vaunting authority, an easy way with a cigar, a sly smile, and a strong voice. "I am Orson Welles!" he thunders, when challenged. "I own the store." The picture has great spirit and considerable charm. It's about the giddiness of promise—the awakening of young talents to a moment when anything seems possible. With Claire Danes as Welles's friendly but opportunistic secretary. Holly Gent Palmo and Vince Palmo adapted Robert Kaplow's 2003 novel. Richard Linklater directed. With classic swing music from the period and the martial, drums-and-brass score that Marc Blitzstein wrote for Welles's "Julius Caesar."—*D.D.* (11/30/09) (In wide release.)

THE MEN WHO STARE AT GOATS

Believe it or not, the U.S. Army used to contain a special unit that was devoted exclusively to the use of psychic power as a tool of war. That, at any rate, is the scoop dug up by Bob Wilton (Ewan McGregor), an eager reporter based in Ann Arbor, Michigan. En route to Iraq, he encounters a restive figure named Cassidy (George Clooney), who claims to have been a "Jedi Warrior"—a secret operative trained in mental combat. His reminiscences revolve around a man named Django (Jeff Bridges), who urged his super-recruits to run through walls and peer into the future. So clearly is this the comic heart of Grant Heslov's film that he gets stuck in a loop of flashbacks; these are so diverting (especially when Kevin Spacey rolls up as Django's nemesis) that they drain the fun from the adventures of Cassidy and the Wilton kid, which seem hapless and inconsequential by comparison. The script, by Peter Straughan, is adapted from a nonfiction book by the British journalist Jon Ronson, and it's no surprise that the leading men, with Clooney in good fettle, should relish the battle of deluded wits; yet the story, even if parts of it are provable, barely feels like a story at all, let alone a durable satire on military policy. It's more like a string of larks and skits, dangling in space, waiting for a plot to come along.—*A.L.* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE MESSENGER

Captain Tony Stone (Woody Harrelson), an Army lifer with a shaved head and a jaw like a stone jetty, and Staff Sergeant Will Montgomery (Ben Foster), a coiled, secretive Iraq-war hero, work together at what is surely the worst job in the armed forces: telling parents and spouses that a loved one has been killed in Iraq. There's an excruciatingly obvious but unavoidable irony here: the movie itself has taken on the unwelcome task of telling its audience what it doesn't want to hear—news of the way families get hit by an unending war. Yet it doesn't feel dutiful or solemn. This is a fully felt, morally alert, marvellously acted piece of work. Harrelson, with his eye-popping glare and acetylene voice, takes his usual wild-man character deep into melancholy and loneliness; the mesmerizing Foster, whose eyes seem to look inward and outward at the same time, eases the tense, guilty war hero back into life. The two form an uneasy, carousing friendship. The visits to the families are done with great delicacy, but great courage, too, and after a while we feel not like voyeurs but like participants. With a droopy, passive Samantha Morton—the movie's only weakness—as a widow whom the sergeant falls in love with. The director, Oren Moverman (a veteran of the Israeli Army), is clearly a whiz with actors. He co-wrote the script with Alessandro Camon.—*D.D.* (11/16/09) (In wide release.)

PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL "PUSH" BY SAPPHIRE

How you respond to Lee Daniels's film is likely to depend on two variables: first, to what extent the preposterous title will get your tongue in a twist, and, second, whether or not you object to having extreme domestic abuse waved in front of your face. Gabourey Sidibe plays an obese, unhappy Harlem teen-ager named Clareece Jones; the task of the movie is to turn her nickname, Precious, from a wretched irony to a cause for pride—to surround her with people who will treasure her as she deserves. At the start, this seems a distant dream, since Precious is pregnant with her second child (by her own father) and trapped at home with her monster of a mother (Mo'Nique)—a withering portrait of indolence and wrath. (Might conservatives latch on to the film as a cautionary tale about an obsessive reliance on welfare? If so, that hardly seems to be what Daniels intended.) Precious finds hope in an alternative-school program, where she meets the beautiful and saintly—not to say implausible—figure of Blu Rain (Paula Patton). The tonal blend of damp-eyed fantasy and gruelling, closeup brutishness is at once morally suspect and highly effective in its manipulations; what rescues the story from the brink of the gothic is the poise and purpose of its leading performers—including Mariah Carey, no less, who is almost unrecognizable in her role as a social worker.—*A.L.* (11/9/09) (In wide release.)

THE PRIVATE LIVES OF PIPPA LEE

A fine cast of actors, headed by Robin Wright Penn and including Alan Arkin, Keanu Reeves, Winona Ryder, and Maria Bello, appear in the writer and director Rebecca Miller's melodrama, about a well-off and respected middle-aged woman who takes stock of her entire life—starting from birth—in the face of suddenly and drastically changed circumstances. Unfortunately, Miller seems to have left the actors on their own, and her writing doesn't help: the banality of the dialogue, the absurdly convenient arrivals of useful characters and the deaths of troublesome ones, and the lack of dramatic pacing and development sabotage the potentially interesting theme of a woman who has lived only in relation to others and neglected to know herself. The grand buildup to a personal breakthrough becomes merely an invitation for a viewer's sarcasm.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

THE ROAD

It's hard to say how Cormac McCarthy's celebrated novel should have been done as a movie—or whether it should have been done at all. For most of the film, we watch Viggo Mortensen, as The Man, and Kodi Smit-McPhee, as The Boy, walk through a dichromatic gray-brown post-apocalyptic landscape, peopled only by a few survivors (some of them cannibals feasting on human captives). The grimly punitive monotony of the leafless, colorless, humorless production may fool some people into thinking it's art. With the golden Charlize Theron, as The Man's wife (seen in a flashback to better days), and Robert Duvall, as a bitter old coot waiting to die. Shot in a wrecked industrial landscape near Pittsburgh. Screenplay by Joe Penhall. Directed by John Hillcoat.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

2012

One day, Roland Emmerich will take a breather and give us a modest, thinly peopled costume drama in which, at the climax, somebody drops a teacup, but that day has *not* yet dawned. For now, the maker of "Godzilla" and "The Day After Tomorrow" remains intent on disaster, in every sense. The new film stars John Cusack (wearing the distracted look of an actor who badly wishes he were somewhere else), as an unsuccessful author with a failed marriage behind him; as luck would have it, therapy is on hand, in the shape of a catastrophic shift in the earth's crust, which, while slaying millions and flooding large portions of the globe, will nonetheless enable him to hug his beloved (Amanda Peet) once more. The special effects, which demand that mortal peril be evaded by the narrowest of squeaks, and which culminate in the launching of lifesaving arks in the Himalayas, manage both to overbear and to underwhelm. As in other Emmerich movies, the script seems to be poorly translated from the Martian, and even distinguished actors—including Thandie Newton, Chiwetel Ejiofor, and (as the American President) Danny Glover—are left to flounder in the mess.—*A.L.* (11/23/09) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

A CHRISTMAS CAROL: In wide release. **HOME:** In limited release. **OLD DOGS:** In wide release.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES

32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—In première. Dec. 2-8 at 7 and 9: "FILM IST. a girl & a gun" (2009, Gustav Deutsch; in German). ♦ Dec. 5-6 at 3:30: "FILM IST. (1-6)" (1998, Deutsch; in German). ♦ Dec. 5-6 at 5: "FILM IST. (7-12)" (2002, Deutsch; in German).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS

30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—In revival. Dec. 2 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "The Weight of Water" (2000, Kathryn Bigelow). The 6:50 screening will be followed by a discussion with Elliot Stein. ♦ The films of Liv Ullmann. All films are in Swedish. Dec. 3 at 6:30 and 9:30: "Faithless" (2000). ♦ Dec. 4 at 2, 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Passion of Anna" (1969, Ingmar Bergman). ♦ Dec. 5 at 2, 5, 7:15, and 9:30: "Cries and Whispers" (†). The 2 P.M. screening will be followed by a Q. & A. with Ullmann. ♦ Dec. 6 at 2 and 6:50: "Autumn Sonata" (1978, Bergman). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4:30 and 9:15: "The Serpent's Egg" (1977, Bergman). ♦ "The Next Director." Dec. 8 at 6:50 and 9:30: "Salt" (2003, Bradley Rust Gray).

FILM FORUM

W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Dec. 2-3 at 1, 2:50, 4:40, 6:30, 8:20, and 10:10: "Mr. Hulot's Holiday" (1953, Jacques Tati). ♦ The films of James Whale. Dec. 4 at 1, 3:50, 6:40, and 9:25: "Frankenstein" (1931). ♦ Dec. 4 at 2:25, 5:15, and 8: "The Invisible Man" (1933). ♦ Dec. 5 at 1, 4, and 7: "The Old Dark House" (1932). ♦ Dec. 5 at 2:30, 5:30, and 8:30 and Dec. 6 at 1 and 10: "Bride of Frankenstein" (1935). ♦ Dec. 5 at 10: "Gods and Monsters" (1998, Bill Condon). ♦ Dec. 6 at 2:30, 5:30, and 8:30: "Waterloo Bridge" (1931). ♦ Dec. 6 at 4:05 and 7:05: "The Kiss Before the Mirror" (1933). ♦ Dec. 7 at 1, 5:15, and 9:30: "By Candlelight" (1933). ♦ Dec. 7 at 2:25 and 6:40: "Impatient Maiden" (1932). ♦ Dec. 7 at 3:55 and 8:10: "Sinners in Paradise" (1938). ♦ Dec. 8 at 1:30, 5:20, and 9:10: "The Man in the Iron Mask" (1939). ♦ Dec. 8 at 3:35 and 7:25: "Green Hell" (1940).

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (212-875-5610)—"Celebrating Chekhov." All films are in Russian. Dec. 2 at 2 and 6:15: "An Unfinished Piece for Player Piano" (1977, Nikita Mikhalkov). ♦ Dec. 2 at 4: "The Shooting Party," a.k.a. "The Accident" (1978, Emil Loteanu). ♦ Dec. 2 at 8:15 and Dec. 3 at 8:20: "Ward No. 6" (2009, Karen Shakhnazarov). ♦ Dec. 3 at 1:15: "Uncle Vanya" (1970, Andrei Konchalovsky). ♦ "Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish. Dec. 4 at 2:15 and Dec. 6 at 3: "The Good News" (2008, Helena Taberna). ♦ Dec. 4 at 4:30 and Dec. 6 at 5:10: "Hierro" (2009, Gabe Ibáñez). ♦ Dec. 4 at 6:30 and Dec. 5 at 3:25: "Cell 211" (2009, Daniel Monzón). ♦ Dec. 4 at 9:15: "Stigmata" (2009, Adán Aliaga). ♦ Dec. 5 and Dec. 8 at 1:30: "Little Indi" (2009, Marc Recha). ♦ Dec. 5 at 6:15: "Gordos" (2009, Daniel Sánchez Arévalo). ♦ Dec. 5-6 at 9: "[REC] 2" (2009, Jaume Balagueró and Paco Plaza).

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

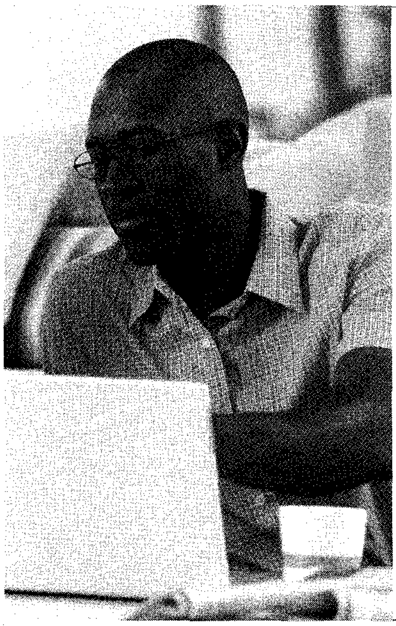
Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 22: The films of François Truffaut. Dec. 8 at 12:30, 4, and 7:30: "The Man Who Loved Women" (†).

IFC CENTER

323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—Special screenings. Dec. 4-6 at 11 A.M.: "Don't Look Back" (†). ♦ "Stranger Than Fiction," a documentary series. Dec. 3 at 8: "Big River Man" (2009, John Maringouin). ♦ Dec. 8 at 8: "A Married Couple" (1969, Allan King), followed by a discussion with the filmmaker Astra Taylor and the critic Dennis Lim.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—"An Auteurist History of Film." Dec. 2-4 at 1:30: "Custer's Last Fight" (1912, Thomas Ince; silent) and "The Cheat" (†). ♦ "Tim Burton and the Lurid Beauty of Monsters." Dec. 2 at 6: "The Omega Man" (1971, Boris Sagal). ♦ Dec. 3 at 8 and Dec. 5 at 3:15: "Jason and the Argonauts" (1963, Don Chaffey). ♦ Dec. 5 at 5:45 and Dec. 6 at 5:30: "Mad Monster Party" (1967, Jules Bass). ♦ "Best Years: Going to the Movies, 1945-1946." Dec. 2 at 8: "The Rainbow" (1944, Mark Donskoy; in Russian). ♦ Dec. 4 at 4:30: "The Dark Corner" (1946, Henry Hathaway). ♦ Dec. 5 at 8:15: "The Battle of the Rails" (1945, René Clément; in French). ♦ "Nuts and Bolts: Machine Made Man." Dec. 3 at 4: "Sleeper" (1973, Woody Allen). ♦ Dec. 3 at 7: "The Iron Giant" (†). ♦ The films of Tim Burton. Dec. 3 at 4:30: "Big Fish" (2003). ♦ Dec. 5 at 1:30: "Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas" (1993, Henry Selick) and "Vincent" (1982). ♦ Dec. 6 at 2:30: "The Corpse Bride" (2005). ♦ "Lithuanian Cinema: 1990-2009." All films are in Lithuanian. Dec. 4 at 4:30: "Children from 'Hotel America' " (1990, Raimundas Banionis). ♦ Dec. 4 at 7 and Dec. 5 at 6: "Three Days" (1991, Sarunas Bartas). ♦ Dec. 5 at 1 and Dec. 6 at 5: "Before Flying Back to Earth" (2005, Arunas Mateli) and "Man-Horse" (2008, Audrius Mickevicius). ♦ Dec. 5 at 3:30: "The House" (1997, Bartas). ♦ Dec. 5 at 8 and Dec. 7 at 4:30: "The Collectress" (2008, Kristina Buozyte). ♦ Dec. 6 at 1: "I Am" (1990, Romas Lileikis and Stasys Motiejunas). ♦ "Cool Men in a Golden Age: Alfred Leslie and Frank O'Hara."



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Dec. 4 at 8: "The Last Clean Shirt" (1964, Alfred Leslie and Frank O'Hara) and "USA Poetry" (1966, Richard O. Moore).

RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

150 W. 17th St. (212-620-5000)—"Cabaret Cinema." Dec. 4 at 9:30: "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1931, Rouben Mamoulian). The film will be introduced by Michael Rips.

SUNSHINE CINEMA

143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine @Midnight." Dec. 4-5: "Rushmore" (1998, Wes Anderson).

READINGS AND TALKS

STRAND BOOK STORE

The chefs David Chang and Mario Batali and the writer Peter Meehan talk about cookbooks and restaurants. (Broadway at 12th St. Dec. 2 at 7.)

JOHN ASHBERY READINGS

The poet reads from his forthcoming collection, "Planisphere," at New York University's Tishman Auditorium on Dec. 3 at 7. (40 Washington Sq. S., at MacDougal St. No tickets necessary.) Later that night, at 8, Douglas Dunn and Dancers present a staged reading of Ashbery's monumental poem "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror," with six readers—Joan Arnold, Andrea Barnet, Jan Hanvik, James Occhino, Jim Paul, and Annie Walwyn-Jones—and projected text and images. (541 Broadway, between Prince and Spring Sts., third fl. 866-811-4111.)

THE EXPLORERS CLUB

The club's second annual Ocean Forum, featuring the marine toxicologist Susan Shaw, the oceanographer Sylvia Earle, the undersea-robotics innovator David Gallo, and other leading scientists, addresses everything from eliminating pollution and creating safe marine habitats to thinking about future ocean policy and creating public action through new technology. (46 E. 70th St. 212-628-8383. Dec. 7 at 6.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

VARIETY SHOW TELETHON BASH

The Debutante Hour, a lively female vocal trio whose members play the accordion, the cello, and the drums, needs money to record a new album, so they're putting on a show, with performances by other bands, jugglers, puppeteers, opera singers, and comedians. (The roster includes Jonathan Wood Vincent, the Wowz, Phoebe Kreutz, Old Hat, Kung Fu Crime Wave, Rachel Feinstein, Michael Richter, Victor Varnado, Herb Scher, Marti Newland, Sweet Soubrette, Grits and Harmony, and the Orange Teardrops.) Donations will be accepted on twenty old—allegedly Soviet—rotary phones, and there will be a silent auction for such prizes as a private show in the winner's living room, cupcakes baked by the Debutantes, and a canoe trip with the group down the Gowanus Canal. (Ukrainian National Home, 140 Second Ave., between St. Marks Pl. and 9th St. 212-529-6287. Dec. 5 at 7.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Christie's kicks off the month with a frenzy of sales, beginning with an auction of American paintings, drawings, and sculptures on Dec. 2 that features a haunting and poetic tempera by Andrew Wyeth, a portrait of his lanky teen-age son staring out to sea ("Above the Narrows"). The house tips its hat to another homegrown art form, country music, in an auction on Dec. 3 that includes Buddy Holly's Gibson J-45 guitar and a C. F. Martin D-18 that was owned by Hank Williams, as well as a spiffy black outfit, with red piping and gold embellishments, made for Johnny Cash. A rare first edition of Edgar Allan Poe's early volume "Tamerlane and Other Poems" is one of the highlights of a sale of items from the library of the Hollywood actor turned producer William E. Self (Dec. 4); the house finishes the round of sales with an auction of photographs (Dec. 7) and a day of decorative-art and design sales (Dec. 8). (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Sotheby's** offers its own sale of American art on Dec. 3, with a special emphasis on American Impressionism and modernism, as represented by Childe Hassam's 1895 canvas "The White Dory, Gloucester" (depicting a lovely young woman in white wearing a straw boater as she sits primly in a shallow rowboat) and Marsden Hartley's boldly colored "Mountains No. 22." The sale even includes a seasonal lot, Norman Rockwell's "Under the Mistletoe," created for a holiday-themed cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1936. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Phillips** has moved its December sale of jewelry (Dec. 8) from Geneva to New York, where it will take over a gallery at the Mark Hotel. On offer is a selection of gems that range from a giant Burmese pear-shaped sapphire to a "suite" of brown-colored, pyramid-shaped diamonds, comprising a necklace, dangling earrings, and a bracelet, all by Boucheron. (Mark Hotel, 992 Madison Ave., at 77th St. 212-940-1200.) ♦ **Doyle,** too, puts on the glitter on Dec. 8, offering Victorian, Art Nouveau, Art Deco, and modern jewelry from various estates. (175 E. 87th St. 212-427-2730.)

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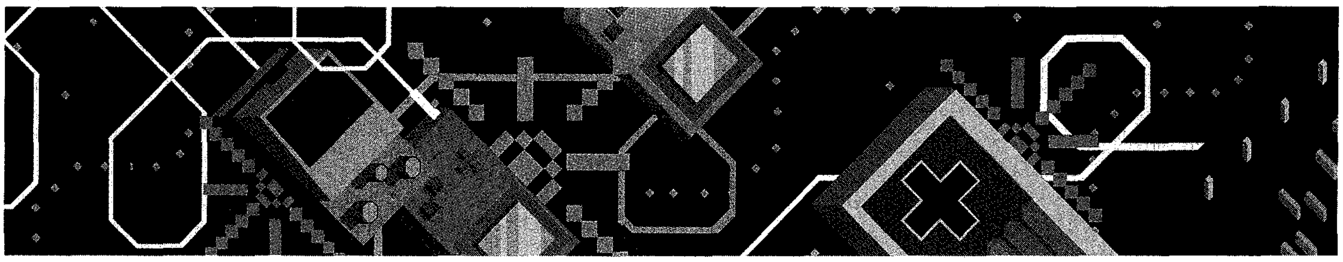
Visit the Goings On blog, at www.newyorker.com/go/goingson, for additional cultural coverage and commentary.



ON THE HORIZON

DANCE
HAIR TRIGGER

Dec. 9-12

The Australian dance troupe Chunky Move is known for its cutting-edge multimedia experiments. In "Mortal Engine," at BAM, the dancers' movements on a steeply raked platform control green lasers and other lighting effects. (718-636-4100.)

ART
DR. J

Dec. 9-Feb. 6

Samuel Johnson would have been three hundred this year. To celebrate, the Grolier Club borrows some gems of Johnsoniana—the only surviving letter from the great man to his wife, portraits by Josiah Wedgwood & Sons and Sir Joshua Reynolds—from Harvard's renowned Hyde Collection, for the exhibition "A Monument More Durable Than Brass." (212-838-6690.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND
SILICONE SALVATION

Dec. 17-19

Not all microchips are fated to die in a landfill. Some get second lives at the Blip Festival, at the Bell House, in Brooklyn, which features music and art made with old computers and game systems such as the Commodore 64 and the Atari 2600. (www.blipfestival.org.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
SOFT POWER

Dec. 20

For more than two decades, the female vocal quartet Anonymous 4 has offered programs of medieval music with intensity and grace. Its latest is "The Cherry Tree," a collection of Christmas carols and songs, which will be performed as part of the "Music Before 1800" series. (212-666-9266.)

MOVIES
SILENT DAYS

Dec. 21-23

Charlie Chaplin, the cinema's first international superstar, turned his Little Tramp into a secular, anarchic, long-suffering exemplar of the last and least of humanity. To ring in the holiday season, Film Society of Lincoln Center presents Chaplin's last silent film, "City Lights," and "Modern Times," from 1936, a Depression-age pantomime that concludes with Chaplin introducing his voice. (212-875-5610.)

The Blip Festival, at the Bell House.

TOMBY

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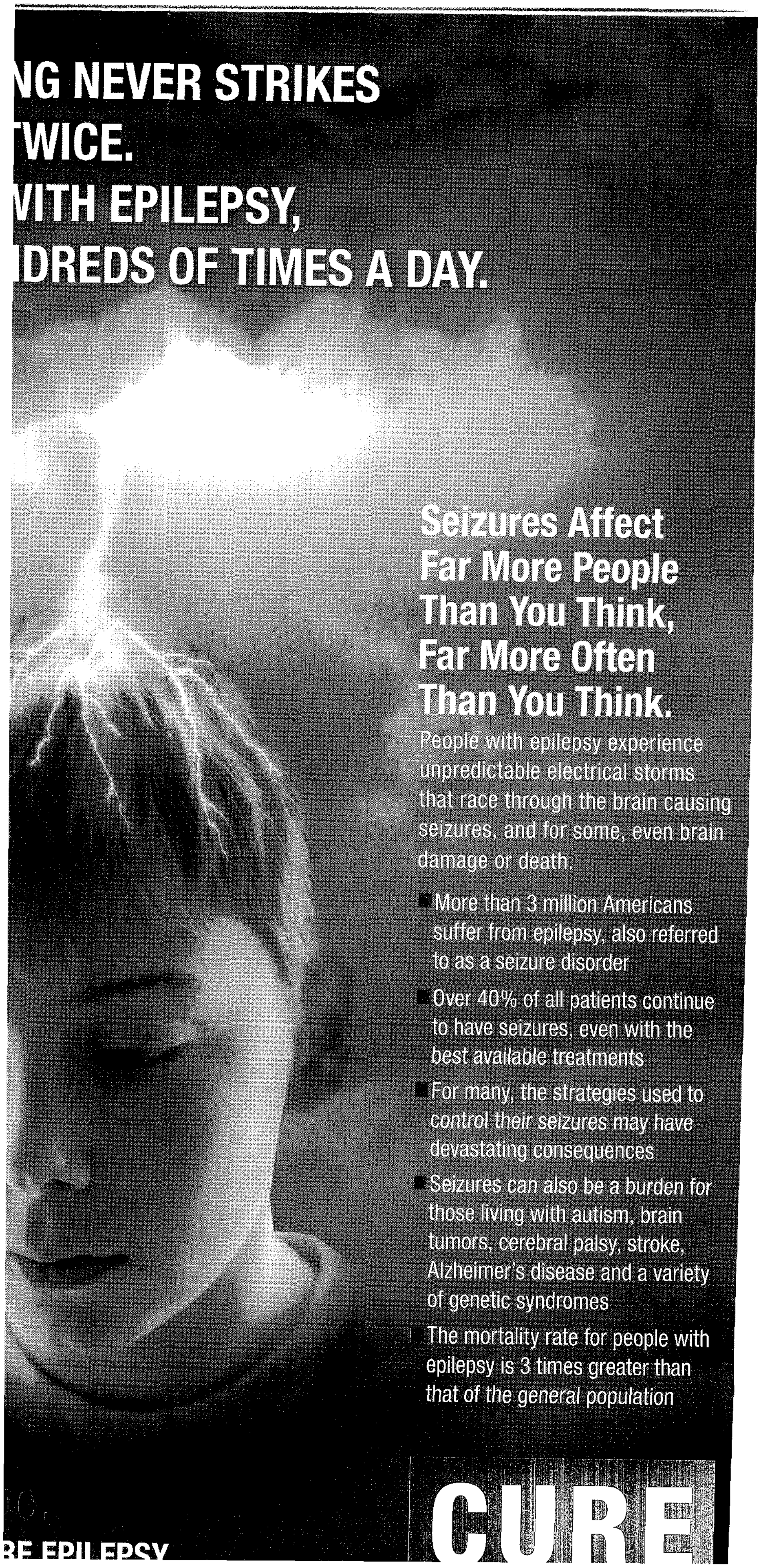


Seizures Affect Far More People Than You Think, Far More Often Than You Think.

People with epilepsy experience unpredictable electrical storms that race through the brain causing seizures, and for some, even brain damage or death.

- More than 3 million Americans suffer from epilepsy, also referred to as a seizure disorder
- Over 40% of all patients continue to have seizures, even with the best available treatments
- For many, the strategies used to control their seizures may have devastating consequences
- Seizures can also be a burden for those living with autism, brain tumors, cerebral palsy, stroke, Alzheimer's disease and a variety of genetic syndromes
- The mortality rate for people with epilepsy is 3 times greater than that of the general population

THE
NEW YORKER

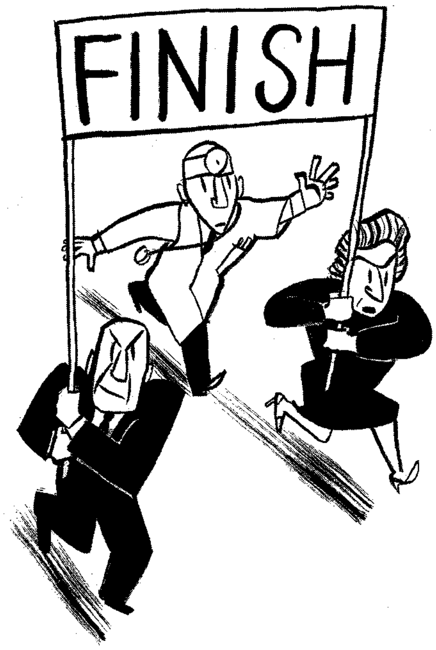
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
PREËXISTING CONDITION

"At present the United States has the unenviable distinction of being the only great industrial nation without compulsory health insurance," the Yale economist Irving Fisher said in a speech in December. December of 1916, that is. More than nine decades ago, Fisher thought that universal health coverage was just around the corner. "Within another six months, it will be a burning question," he predicted. Oh, well. What's a century, give or take?

Health care has been on the docket longer than most Americans can expect to live, with or without it. "Let's take a quick trip back in time," Sheldon Whitehouse, a Democrat from Rhode Island, said on the Senate floor this past July, whereupon he proceeded to page through back issues of the *Times*, quoting headlines about the astronomical cost of health care in 1992, 1988, and 1979, all the way to 1955 (the year he was born), to read this timeless line: "As it does each year without fail, the government declared again this week that it is time to do something about the rising cost of medical care." Health-care reform isn't premature, Whitehouse insisted. It's "55 years late." (Or ninety-three. But who's counting?) Last month, Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee, a Texas Democrat, echoed the point that it was funny to call health-care reform "rushed": "America has been working on providing access to health care for all Americans since the nineteen-thirties, the nineteen-forties, the nineteen-fifties, the nineteen-sixties, nineteen-seventies, nineteen-eighties, and the nineteen-nineties."

True enough, but don't forget the nineteen-tens. In 1912, the year after Parliament passed a National Insurance Act, the American Association for Labor Legislation (which Glenn Beck would surely call Bolshevik but was, in fact, a group of economists whose officers included Louis Brandeis, Jane Addams, and Woodrow Wilson) formed the Committee on Social Insurance, the brainchild of Isaac M. Rubinow, a Russian-born doctor turned policy wonk and the author of the landmark study "Social Insurance." Rubinow hoped that "sickness insurance" would help eradicate poverty. It was also the next logical step after workers' compensation, which the association had got passed in more than a dozen states. By 1915, Rubinow's committee had drafted a bill providing for universal medical coverage. "No other social movement in modern economic development is so pregnant with benefit to the public," the editor of the *Journal of the American Medical Association* wrote. The next year, Congress began debating Rubinow's bill, which was also put forward in sixteen states. That's why Irving Fisher was so optimistic. It looked like this thing was good to go.



In December, 1916, Fisher delivered an address titled "The Need for Health Insurance," at a joint session of the American Association for Labor Legislation, the American Economic Association (he was president of both), the American Sociological Society, and the American Statistical Association. "Germany showed the way in 1883," Fisher told his audience. "Her wonderful industrial progress since that time, her comparative freedom from poverty . . . and the physical preparedness of her soldiery, are presumably due, in considerable measure, to health insurance."

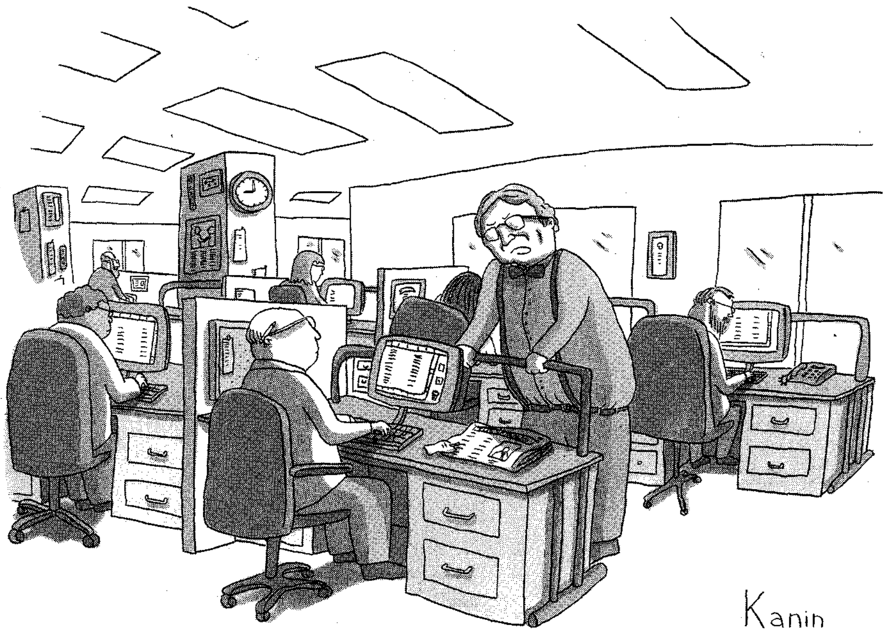
You can probably already see where this is heading. The United States declared war with Germany in April, 1917. Health care was dead. Critics said that it was "made in Germany" and likely to result in the "Prussianization of America." In

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

California, where the legislature had passed a constitutional amendment providing for universal health insurance, it was put on the ballot for ratification: a federation of insurance companies took out an ad in the San Francisco *Chronicle* warning that it “would spell social ruin to the United States.” Every voter in the state received in the mail a pamphlet with a picture of the Kaiser and the words “Born in Germany. Do you want it in California?” (“If you are opposed to a thing these days,” one frustrated health-care advocate wrote, “the cheapest way to attack it is to call it ‘German.’ ”) The people of California voted it down. By 1919, John J. A. O’Reilly, a Brooklyn physician, was calling universal health insurance “UnAmerican, Unsafe, Uneconomic, Unscientific, Unfair and Unscrupulous.”

And so it goes, and so it has gone, all the way to this year’s “socialized medicine.” In 1934, Rubinow published “The Quest for Security.” He urged F.D.R. to include health care in the New Deal. But by then the American Medical Association had switched sides. Government meddling in medicine, the editor of *JAMA* said, came down to a question of “Americanism versus sovietism.” In 1965, it was “creeping socialism.” Lately, it’s hard to keep track of whether health care for everyone is Bolshevism, Fascism, Nazism, or Communism. Odds are, though, that it comes from someplace you need a time machine to get to. Or at least an airplane. This year, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell accused President Obama and his allies of “an audacious effort to Europeanize the country.”

Meanwhile, health care has grown more expensive, which makes reform harder. By now, the accretion of ineptitude begins to look like a tradition. The argument against health-care reform often amounts to a) it’s foreign and b) we have gone this far without it, thank you very much. The more time passes, the more it looks as if having no real health-care plan were the American way. That has led to some contorted logic: usually, reformers counter appeals to xenophobia by appealing to heritage. (When in doubt, deploy the Founding Fathers.) During the nineteen-forties, health-care reformers tried to make the claim that there was a precedent for health-care legislation. In 1798, John Adams had signed an “Act for the relief of sick and disabled Seamen”: state and, later, federal government officials collected taxes from shipmasters which were used to build hospitals and provide medical care for merchant and naval seamen. Government-sponsored health care wasn’t un-American, the argument went; Adams had thought of it. Unfortunately, that’s about as silly as arguing that the Second Amendment was written to provide for the purchase of AK-47s. It’s so crazy it only works if you’re well armed.



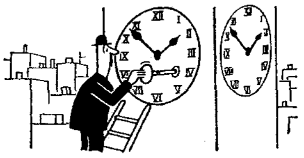
“Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold the phone. You’re telling me that this whole time you’ve just been making up *the horoscopes?”*

Irving Fisher did not usher in universal health coverage. He is best remembered for helping to found econometrics. He also invented the precursor to the Rolodex. And in 1915 he published a best-seller, “How to Live: Rules for Healthful Living Based on Modern Science,” in which he urged a diet of fruit and vegetable juice (he had a mortal fear of insufficiently chewed food) and for which William Howard Taft, the fattest President in American history, gamely supplied an endorsement. Taft tipped the scales at three hundred pounds. Some people know what’s good for them; they just don’t do it.

—*Jill Lepore*

DEADLINE DEPT.

JUST A MINUTE



In Madagascar, according to the social psychologist Robert Levine in his book “A Geography of Time,” a person might describe a half hour as “the time of a rice-cooking.” In the Cross River region of Nigeria, fifteen minutes is “less than the time in which maize is not yet completely roasted.” Thanks to the City Council, which recently approved a bill instituting a grace period for the enforcement of illegal parking, five minutes in New York City may soon be “the time in which a deadbeat doesn’t have to move his car or feed the Muni Meter.” Mayor Bloomberg has said that he will veto the measure, which he dismissed as a municipal mulligan—a chaos-inducing gesture that “has to do with making everybody feel good.” (Never mind that his third term was itself a sort of gimme.) Still, in recent weeks, the extension of amnesty—and the expectation of it—has pervaded the city. The I.R.S. offered immunity to people who had admitted to hiding their assets in offshore accounts. Metro-North and Amtrak confessed that they had built an extra minute into every departure time, while the Environmental Control Board advertised a “penalty relief program” for delinquent trash dumpers. Aboard the No. 1 train, a panhandler got in on the

Considers your
environment too

act. "It is Sunday," he announced. "My rent was due today at noon. They don't even have a grace period."

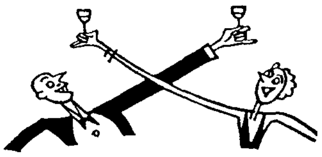
According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the phrase originally was "days of grace period"—the interval allowed for the payment of a bill after its due date. Defoe made mention of the concept in 1731, in "The Complete English Tradesman." Grace periods are stays of execution for procrastinators and scofflaws. They and their offspring—term-paper extensions, debt deferrals—are the limbos of modern life, in which judgment is suspended on sins committed out of laziness, bad luck, or lack of common sense. At their most reasonable, they acknowledge that people need time to react to unpredictable events. In Iowa this hunting season, once two hundred bobcats and five hundred otters had been caught, the state's Department of Natural Resources granted a forty-eight-hour grace period for the removal of traps.

Grace periods of the sort the City Council is pushing made sense in the not-so-long-ago days when clocks were less synchronized—"'Tis with our judgments as our watches; none Go just alike, yet each believes his own," Pope wrote. In an era of cell phones and G.P.S., City Council Speaker Christine Quinn's contention that parking enforcement was a technological challenge—"11 A.M. on somebody's watch could be 11:02 A.M. on a traffic agent or police officer's watch," she said—is a little tough to buy. In any case, it seemed odd for a public official to be promoting the view that time, and thus the laws that depend on it, is fungible. (In Peru, where citizens are said to run a collective three billion hours late each year, the government has launched a punctuality drive. Malawi's former President Kamuzu Banda outlawed broken clocks.) Speedometers vary, but no one suggests that drivers can't find a way to obey the speed limit; you don't get to vote if you turn up after the polling station has closed. The problem with grace periods is that, like good deeds, they beget themselves. For a grace period to work, it has to be a secret. Otherwise, it is simply a later deadline, to be blown and then renegotiated. The City Council's approach to timekeeping brought to mind that of the Mursi people of southwestern Ethiopia, who, Levine writes, "treat the calendar as something to be discussed and argued about . . . mak[ing] up the details as they go along."

Levine, reached on the telephone, said, "My guess would be that it's meant to send a message of deference to people. It's a clever way of saying, 'I understand that I'm a public servant, that you are the people we're serving.' But, realistically, I don't quite get it." New Yorkers who supported the plan seemed to view it as a temporal rebate—a payback of time they'd lost, rather than a bequest of time that wasn't theirs to begin with. In five minutes, you can take a personality test, be introduced to Buddhism, floss your teeth, boil an egg. Or you can just move your car and get it over with.

—*Lauren Collins*

THE BOARDS
SAUCE ON THE SIDE



It's a given that almost every waiter in Manhattan is an aspiring actor, but those who wait tables in midtown have some extra perks: proximity to auditions and the Capezio store, and plenty of networking opportunities. But rarely do the dual vocations achieve the kind of symbiosis that they have at Orso, on West Forty-sixth Street, where several members of the staff have banded together to produce and star in an Off-Broadway play—S. N. Behrman's 1932 comedy "Biography," at Theatre 3, on West Forty-third Street. Reservations suggested.

"A lot of people in New York spend all their time trying instead of doing," Kevin Albert, the general manager at Orso and, in the play, a bumbling Southern politician, said the other night. It was half past eleven—or, as Albert called it, "wine thirty"—and he was sitting at a table near the bar. He was joined by his collaborators: Simon MacLean, a waiter, who plays a movie star in "Biography," and Cheryl Orsini, who, besides mixing acclaimed margaritas, portrays a testy German maid.

Albert grew up in Vermont and moved to New York in 1994, with the dream of dancing on Broadway. He met Orsini, a former New Jersey Turnpike toll collector who had just returned from a European tour of "Hair," while working at Orso, and encouraged her to join an acting class that he was taking. There they met MacLean, who had left his job as a consultant in Portland, Oregon, to come to New York and try acting. When an opening came up at Orso, Albert recruited him. After their acting teacher died, his widow cast all three in a production of "The Crucible," upstate. Feeling hopeful, they held a meeting one night at the restaurant—"at Table 17, where that white-haired woman is," MacLean said, pointing—and decided to bring the show to New York, where it played for a month at the ArcLight Theatre. "Biography" is their second production. "We're talking about a reading series, and we're trying to do a Clifford Odets play," MacLean said.

MacLean leaped up to say good night to Joe Torre, who'd been eating a bowl of pasta at the next table. "I am a lifelong Red Sox fan and I've always hated you, but I have a deep and profound respect for you," MacLean said.

"Thank you," Torre said, looking puzzled, and left.

Orso staff

Returning to the table, MacLean said that he sees a kinship between the group's artistic values and the vibe at Orso. "We serve fantastic food that's simply and beautifully executed," he said. "There's no flair—we're not doing all kinds of sauces. The theatre that we do is the same thing. It's about conveying what's in the mind and

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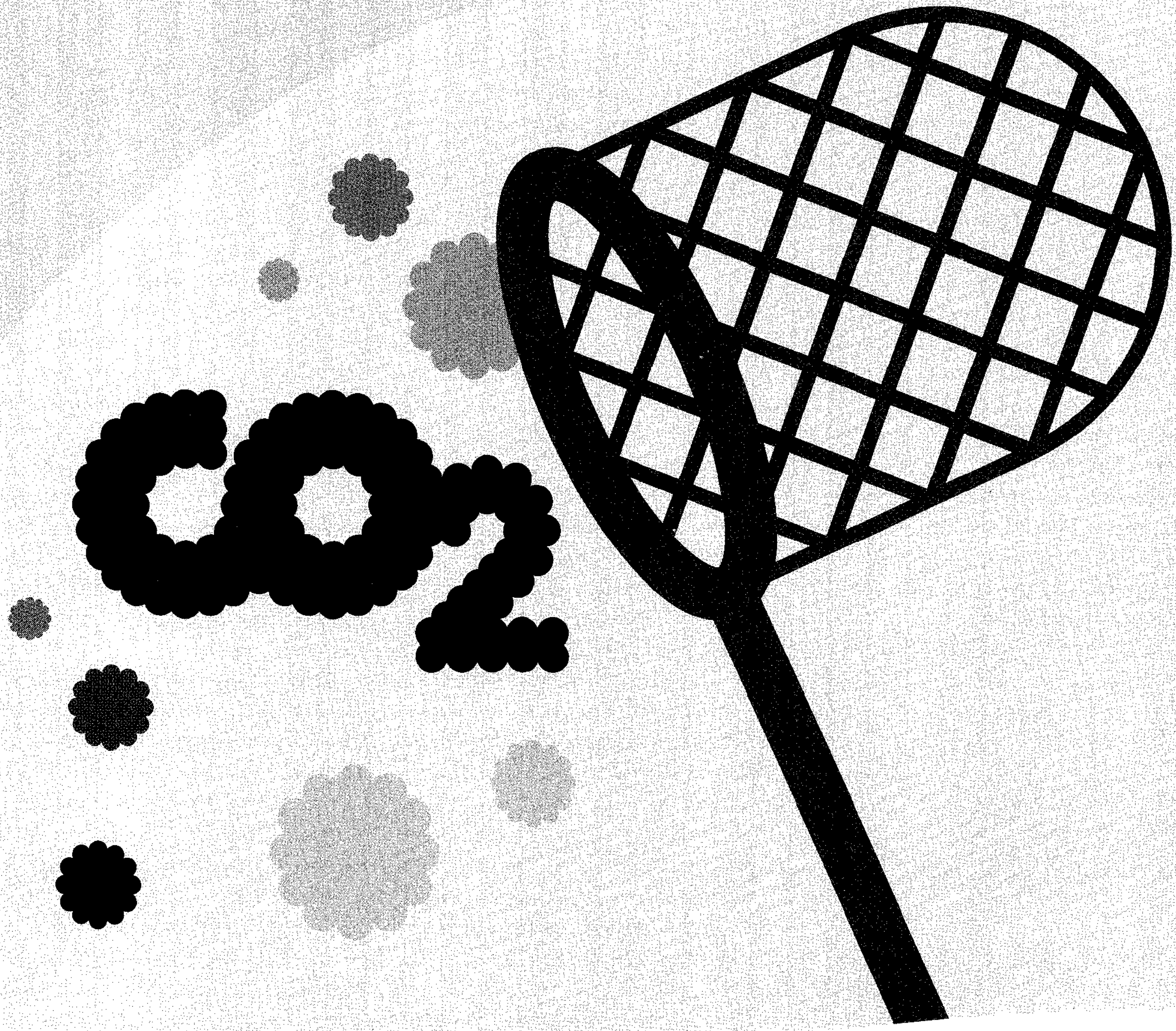


the heart, without a lot of hubbub."

The collaborators are careful about drawing a line between their two jobs, and for the most part have avoided talking up the show to patrons. Albert has a personal rule: "If they ask me, I'll tell them." Both men had grown mustaches for their roles, which turned out to be a useful marketing tool. "People ask about the mustache, and it's the perfect opportunity to talk about the show," Albert said. Many of their regulars have expressed interest, including the actors Jim Norton ("Finian's Rainbow") and David Hyde Pierce. "On Wednesdays, we could have people come and see the matinée, and then, immediately following it, we could be serving them dinner," MacLean said.

Nearby, at Table 3, Ken and Ellen Stuart, who estimate that they eat at Orso twenty-three times a year, were drinking cappuccinos. They had already bought tickets to "Biography."

"We went to see 'The Crucible,'" Ken said, after handing Albert the check. "It was a great experience. Orso is our favorite restaurant, and we're very nicely treated when we come here."

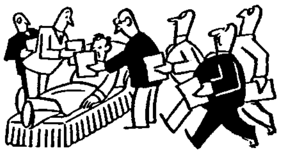
The Stuarts described themselves as frequent theatregoers—their son is an actor and substitute teacher in L.A.—but they especially enjoy seeing their servers onstage. "We both tend to stay awake," Ellen said. "And maybe they'll hand out some pizza bread or something."

A few days later, just before the first performance, Joe Allen, Orso's owner, who is seventy-six, was drinking coffee near the bar. "I wish them well," he said. "And, if they get, as they say, discovered, good for them. There'll be someone else to take their jobs."

—*Michael Schulman*

INK

SPEAK, BELLEVUE



Dr. Martin Blaser, the chair of medicine at N.Y.U. Langone Medical Center, is among the world's leading experts on *Helicobacter pylori*, a corkscrew-shaped, gram-negative bacteria that makes its home in the human gut. Over the past twenty years, Blaser has written some three hundred articles on the topic. He has also written (though not yet published) a "little novella about a journey I took when I was twenty-seven, jumping freight trains. I met this woman and I fell in love with her. It's about a few days in my life." Ten years ago, Blaser was considering how to allocate all the funding that N.Y.U. gives him, when he had an idea. "I had the resources, so I thought, Why don't I try to start a journal?" Thus the *Bellevue Literary Review* was born.

The *B.L.R.* is housed at Bellevue Hospital, which is affiliated with New York University. Bellevue enjoys something of a literary pedigree, having treated, over the years, such patients as Eugene O'Neill and Norman Mailer. Walker Percy did a pathology internship there, but his stay was cut short when he caught tuberculosis from a cadaver.

Although the name "Bellevue" tends to evoke images of straitjackets and padded cells, the institution is more than its psychiatric ward; it is actually the oldest public hospital in the United States. "No one was turned away," Blaser said. "We're the place of last resort." Not so for the *B.L.R.*, which Blaser says is "harder to get into than *The New England Journal of Medicine*." Each year, the magazine, which publishes twice a year, receives three thousand submissions of poetry and prose, on topics ranging from angina to Zoloft. A sample of titles: "Midnight in the Alzheimer's Suite," "The Liver Nephew," "The Girl with the Mechanical Leg," "Pernicious Anemia," "Flu Shot," "Looking Out the Window of Dunkin' Donuts, Contemplating McLean Hospital's Research." Some of the manuscripts come from Bellevue doctors; once, the editors received eighty handwritten pages from a Bellevue mental patient. (All of these were rejected.)

Not long ago, about a hundred people gathered in Bellevue's grand rotunda for a reading by *B.L.R.* contributors. After some standard pre-reading activities (milling, Merlot), a poet took the stage.

"This is a beautiful venue!" she said. "It's so different from the dive bars I usually read in." She recited a poem about a friend who was killed while outlet shopping. The other readers also offered odes to mortality—a dead guinea pig, a dead ex-mother-in-law. At one point, the scent of stale urine wafted briefly through the room and a pair of doctors in teal scrubs wandered past the lectern.

When the reading ended, a group of white-haired women in the third row compared notes. Ruth Calman, leaning on a walker, announced that this had been her first poetry reading. "It was very, very interesting," she said. "It's not bingo."

Blaser led the way upstairs to a conference room, for Turkish takeout. He introduced two of the magazine's editors, Dr. Jerome Lowenstein (nephrologist, novelist) and Dr. Danielle Ofri (internist, essayist). The walls of the room seemed to reflect the editors' divided interests—literary journals on one side, medical journals on the other. Ofri stood on the medical side and talked about doctors and writing. The standard medical prose style, she said, is "so sterile you could not grow a staphylococcal organism on it." She said she approved of the decision by several leading medical journals to publish some creative writing: "If you think about it, when *JAMA* prints a poem, they're giving up, you know, a Levitra ad." Ofri's experience honing her bedside manner has taught her to be gentle in writing rejection letters. "It's like giving someone a diagnosis," she said.

After dinner, Blaser gave a tour of the *B.L.R.'s* editorial offices, which moonlight as the Department of Medicine. His own office was overflowing with scientific literature: a recent issue of *Cell Host & Microbe* rested at the top of a tall stack.

Blaser's current writing project was a PowerPoint lecture about how *Helicobacter pylori* regulates human physiology. He downplayed the differences between creative and medical writing. "It's the same," he said. "It's all about making a story." And *Helicobacter* is a great protagonist, a kind of microscopic Zelig. "It's always changing its wardrobe," Blaser said. "It's got different pants, different tops, so it can live in the desert climate, it can live in the tropical climate, it can live in the mountains, all within somebody's stomach."

—*Lila Byock*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

THE FRUGAL REPUBLIC

"China makes, the world takes." For decades, that has been the motto of the Chinese economy, which is built on providing an endless supply of goods for the rest of the world to buy. But these days there's a palpable sense that this needs to change. Barack Obama, on his recent trip to Asia, called for a "rebalancing" of the world economy, meaning that China should save less and spend more, while the Chinese President, Hu Jintao, stressed his country's "vigorous" efforts to promote consumer spending. Everyone wants Chinese consumers to spend more. So why don't they?

It isn't that China doesn't spend at all: it's already the world's biggest car market, and consumer spending grew eight per cent annually in the past decade. But, proportionate to its economy, China spends far too little. Consumption accounts for just thirty-five per cent of G.D.P., significantly lower than for most Asian countries and only half the rate in the United States. Chinese households set aside a quarter of their disposable income, and, collectively, consumers and institutions put away $2.5 trillion every year. And in the past ten years consumption has actually fallen as a share of G.D.P. This makes the economy more dependent than ever on exports and investment, creating an imbalance in the global economy. It also means that Chinese consumers aren't really reaping the full fruits of their labor. If Americans are addicted to living beyond their means, the Chinese are too adept at living beneath theirs.

One common explanation for this thrift is that it's the product of "Confucian values." Yet China has not always been so thrifty—in the eighties, consumption was more than fifty per cent of G.D.P.—and today other "Confucian" countries consume far more than China does. The real source of China's underconsumption is the way it manages its economy. Credit isn't always that easy to come by. China's policy of holding down the value of its currency means that consumer prices are higher than they would otherwise be, which obviously discourages spending. And, as a recent McKinsey Global Institute study points out, once you move beyond China's biggest cities, there's often a dearth of retail outlets and products for sale. Potential spenders are also held back by systemic issues. Paradoxically, in this still putatively Communist society, families for the most part have to fend for themselves. Health insurance is limited in what it covers and far from universal, so getting sick can be a costly proposition. Only a fraction of the workforce receives unemployment benefits, while pensions are underfunded and haphazardly administered. A scarcity of student loans and subsidies for higher education, meanwhile, means that paying for college requires hefty savings. The inadequacy of the social safety net forces the Chinese to engage in "precautionary savings," buffering themselves against disaster. A recent Brookings Institution study attributes much of the increase in household savings to the rising cost of health care, together with that of housing and education.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The Chinese government has taken steps to deal with these problems. Ninety per cent of the population, for instance, will supposedly have access to health insurance by 2011. Even so, there's another obstacle to Chinese consumers becoming engines of economic growth: many workers just don't make enough money. While the country's boom has been extraordinary, ordinary workers have not reaped the gains one might expect. In the past decade, in fact, the share of G.D.P. that goes to wages has actually fallen, while the share that goes to profits has risen. Although the prevailing image of China is one of labor-intensive factories, with lots of workers toiling away on antiquated machinery, much investment has gone instead into factories and projects that are capital-intensive, which create fewer jobs. So while the pie has been growing rapidly, the share that goes to individual households has shrunk.

Ultimately, all China's barriers to higher consumption are a product of the fact that for the past three decades its entire economy has been focussed on one thing: making stuff. The Chinese and American economies are mirror images of each other. The American economy revolves around the consumer. Low prices trump all, and enhancing consumer welfare is the ultimate goal. In China, by contrast, the producer is sovereign: investment trumps all, and building is what matters most. Just consider the stimulus plans the two countries enacted earlier this year: In the U.S., most of the stimulus took the form of giving money to individuals via tax cuts and repairing the social safety net by sending aid to the states. China poured almost all its stimulus into infrastructure and construction.

This doesn't mean that China should start emulating the American model. There's no denying that its economic strategy has yielded remarkable results. But there is a point at which you can oversave, and overinvest, and that's where China seems to be. Its current approach depends on the willingness of countries like the U.S. to buy everything China makes while producing very little themselves, which is both risky and arguably unsustainable. More important, it's not necessary: while some assume that striking a better balance between investment and consumption will hurt China's economic growth and cost jobs, the opposite is true. A better safety net, higher wage growth, more options for consumers—these things will create more jobs, not fewer. For China, saving less and spending more will improve the lives of ordinary people in the present and make the economy stronger in the future. That's the rarest of all things in economics: a free lunch. China should go ahead and eat it.

—*James Surowiecki*

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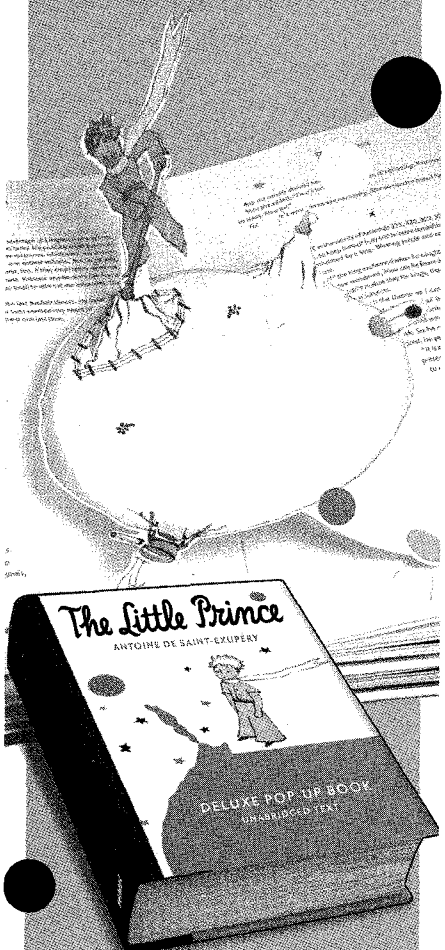

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LETTER FROM AMSTERDAM

PARADE'S END

Dutch liberals get tough.

BY IAN BURUMA

There was something unusual about the Gay Pride Parade held in Amsterdam in August. It wasn't that various cabinet ministers, in suits and ties, had joined the throngs of men dancing to earsplitting techno-pop in pink leather jockstraps, Roman gladiator gear, or patent-leather Speedos on a flotilla of boats gliding along the canals. It wasn't that one of the politicians was a pious Christian Democrat, whose boat was quickly designated "the holy boat," or that soldiers in uniform—real soldiers in real uniforms—were bopping along as well. Or even that Job Cohen, the mayor of Amsterdam, used this fine summer day to marry five gay Dutch people to their American partners.

All this was to be expected in a city that prides itself on its tolerance toward minorities—ethnic, religious, and sexual. A recent publicity campaign promoted tourism in the Dutch capital with the slogan "Everyone's gay in Amsterdam." And the conspicuous presence of city fathers and government ministers on such occasions is also rather Dutch: for centuries, the Dutch establishment has shown genius in coöpting wayward cultural trends. (In the seventies, even the Hells Angels received a government subsidy.)

Instead, the odd thing about the Gay Pride Parade of 2009 was that it was officially opened by a Moroccan-born politician, Ahmed Marcouch, who heads the district council of Slotervaart, a borough with a large Muslim population. Poverty is a serious problem there; unemployment is relatively high, especially among immigrants; and there have been riots, mostly started by idle youths. Many of the offenses committed by the city's Muslim residents are ascribed to their alien culture. They allegedly sacrifice goats on their balconies, beat their wives, and harbor anti-Semitic tendencies. And they are often accused of harassing gay men—spitting at them on the street, jeering at them, or worse. Even when such conduct doesn't rise to the level of illegality, it sins against the official Dutch compact of social tolerance. What many Dutch people have come to regard as the city's "Muslim problem" is found in a conjunction of these two kinds of offense: criminality and illiberal, "un-Dutch" views.

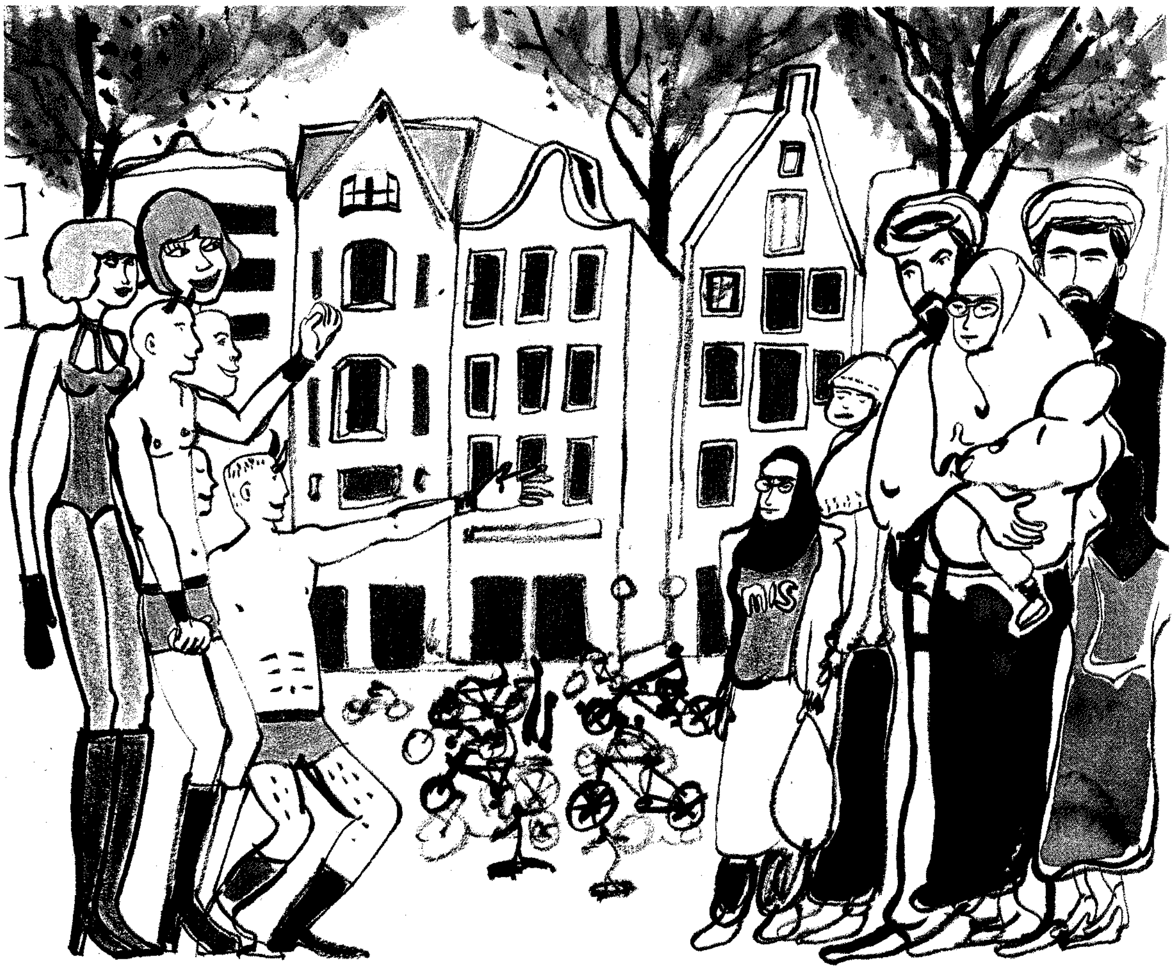
Anti-immigrant populists have seized on issues like gay rights as a way of distinguishing "us," the good native folk, from "them," the bigoted Muslims. They accuse liberals of being soft on crime and tolerant of intolerance. Some members of the liberal élite have responded by coming up with a less compromising approach, stressing Dutch liberal values. That's why people who wish to immigrate to the Netherlands are shown a government-sponsored film that features, among other scenes of Dutch life, male couples kissing. This is Dutch culture, the message goes, and you had better get used to it.

And it's why Ahmed Marcouch, a liberal member of the social-democratic Labor Party, and a divorced ex-policeman, was kicking off the gay jamboree, on a lake in, of all places, Slotervaart. Some people lauded him for a brave gesture. Others criticized him for an unnecessary provocation, of a piece with his frequently quoted assertion that he would welcome the opening of a gay bar in his district. His attitude certainly marks a change from the past, when officials from immigrant communities tended to become defensive in public, ascribing any criticisms of their constituents to racism. There have been a few bold dissenters, to be sure, such as the Somali-born activist Ayaan Hirsi Ali. But she had renounced her faith. Marcouch is still a Muslim.

I met Marcouch a month before the Gay Pride Parade, at the district office in Slotervaart, an area of cheap three- and four-story concrete apartment blocks built mostly in the nineteen-fifties, which are dreary rather than visibly poverty-stricken. The man who, five years ago,

FILIPE JARDIM

killed the filmmaker Theo van Gogh in the name of jihad came from here. I was curious to see how Amsterdam had changed since then. If van Gogh's killer, Mohammed Bouyeri, represented a brand of Islamist extremism, Marcouch, too, seemed to stand for something larger, and certainly more encouraging with respect to the Muslim presence in Europe.



Gay rights have become a proving ground for the Dutch social compact. "We must make our norms more explicit," one politician says.

A stocky, partly bald man with a close-cropped beard, Marcouch offered me a typically Dutch lunch of sandwiches and milk, while explaining his idea of tolerance: "Look, the fact that one is allowed to be an orthodox Muslim is a right. What people in this neighborhood fail to understand is that gays have the right to be gay. People—gays, Muslims, black, white—should never be forced to be untrue to themselves. The freedom of every individual to insist on his own identity must be defended."

Marcouch spoke like a liberal Amsterdammer, but he was born on the north Moroccan coast in 1969. His father, like many immigrants from Turkey and Morocco, arrived in Holland as a *gastarbeider* in the late nineteen-sixties. Marcouch joined his father when he was a ten-year-old, and mastered the language of his adopted country in two years, by reciting Dutch sentences over and over—"like texts in the Koran," he says. He went through a phase of religious fundamentalism ("in search of my identity"), listening incessantly to tapes of Muslim prayers. It was a period when he didn't know how to behave with women and was shy with strangers. Then he got over it, he told me. Though he's still a believer, he is not particularly strict. In 1993, he joined the Amsterdam police, a highly unusual step for a Muslim immigrant. "The police had hardly any contact with Moroccans," he recalled. "I told them that we should go to the mosques. That's where the masses were, the people we needed to reach. They didn't want to know."

Tough liberals like Marcouch often use the word *verloedering*, meaning "squalor," or "degradation." Marcouch's colleagues in the city administration are trying to crack down on such obvious signs of urban degradation as the rampant drug trade, illegal prostitution, and teen-age violence, particularly in heavily immigrant areas like Slotervaart. It has become common to place the blame for such problems on foolish multiculturalism—on too much tolerance of alien ways. I have even heard street crime in Slotervaart described as "a war on the West." Marcouch has a more plausible explanation for the difficulties in his area, where the immigrants are mainly Moroccan and Turkish. "Newcomers have large families, and different habits, and they speak no Dutch," he says. "They have no real ties to the area, and that's what brings *verloedering*. Kids drop out of school. You get a lot of crime. So people are naturally afraid."

When Marcouch came into his new job as the district boss, in 2006, he was handed a broom by his predecessor. "I was shocked by what I saw in Slotervaart," he recalls. "The first Sunday I was here, I got a phone call from a police officer. The cops were being stoned by

"What do you say we get out of here and go someplace less contagious?"

• •

local youths. What should they do? I told them to use the big stick. They said things would escalate. O.K., I said, let them escalate."

To be a Moroccan-Dutch policeman—or, indeed, politician—is to be exposed to criticism from all sides. Non-Muslims have criticized Marcouch for insisting on the importance of sustaining a Muslim identity, which, in his view, should include the teaching of Islam in public schools. One anti-Muslim Web site described him, a little incongruously, as "the same as Arafat." But when he called Moroccan troublemakers in his area "scum," and argued that two criminals who had never bothered to get Dutch passports should be sent back to Morocco, a Muslim critic declared him "worse than Geert Wilders," the right-wing populist politician who is being charged in an Amsterdam court with inciting hatred against Muslims. (Wilders denies the charge.) Some Muslims have attacked Marcouch as a traitor, especially after he made his remarks about the desirability of having a gay bar in his district. "Women in burkas have scolded me for being a *kaffir*, an infidel," he says.

A young Dutch journalist of Moroccan origin, Hassan Bahara, who professes to admire Marcouch, was there when the Gay Pride Parade kicked off in Slotervaart. A week later, in a café in central Amsterdam, he gave me his views. "First of all, Marcouch's gay policy gives the impression to the outside world that everyone in Slotervaart is bent on beating up homosexuals," he said. "This is certainly not true. I think Marcouch—and this is often true of people who try to move away from their background—wants to find a place for himself in Dutch society without losing his Muslim constituency. I don't think he has quite found that place yet." In fact, Marcouch may be up to something more interesting. Breaking away from multicultural pieties, he is looking for a way of reconciling Islam with modern European life, a way to be both a pious Muslim and a liberal-minded citizen.

For all the talk of *verloedering*, the truth is that drug use and violent crime are less of a problem in Amsterdam than they are in many American cities. Even on a Saturday night, Slotervaart is not particularly dangerous. What's distinctive about Amsterdam is that sex and drugs are so visible. Amorous couples spill out of gay bars into the streets on summer nights. In the red-light district, called the Wallen, girls from Russia, Nigeria, Guatemala, and Thailand stand like exotic merchandise behind glass storefronts, many dressed only in panties, beckoning customers to come into their parlors. All over the city center, the sweet smell of hashish wafts from coffee shops, where the smoking of tobacco is banned but a wide variety of potent cannabis is available. Hard-core pornography is openly displayed in specialty stores that offer a bewildering array of sexual paraphernalia. For decades, Amsterdam has accepted the open sex industry as part of its vaunted tolerance. Some people took pride in the red-lighted windows and the sex emporiums. The Dutch say, *"Vrijheid, blijheid,"* which, though it literally means "Freedom, joy," might be roughly translated as "doing your own thing."

The effect of all this on the sons of guest workers from tiny villages in the Rif Mountains, in Morocco—many of whom came of age in the nineteen-nineties—can be imagined. Holland looked like the country where anything went, and the women were free and easy. It meant, to some young men, that while their own sisters had to be shut away from the sinful world, white Dutch women could be treated like whores. It also meant that gay men could be openly despised as symbols of a decadent society.

Many Dutch liberals themselves have started to take a dim view of the sex and drug trades, but for different reasons. Over the past decade or so, it became clear that brothels, sex stores, clubs, and hash cafés were being used to launder large amounts of money for Serbian, Russian, Turkish, and Israeli crime syndicates. A report written in 2005, by a liberal politician who had herself worked as a prostitute, revealed that many of the women had been forced into the sex industry. It slowly dawned on people that "doing your own thing" had reached its limits, and that civic virtues had to be reinvented. Being able to rent a Thai girl for an hour, or to buy a bag of Nepalese Black hashish, was all very well, but Amsterdam, in the words of Lodewijk Asscher, a prominent city alderman, "had become too much of a magnet for international crime. That is why we had to do something."

Like Ahmed Marcouch, Asscher is a breed of social democrat for whom bromides about tolerance are no longer sufficient in the face of modern urban blight. The scion of a prominent Jewish family (his great-grandfather was the head of the Jewish Council in Nazi-occupied Amsterdam), Asscher is a young politician who speaks like a man in a hurry. I saw him in the city hall, not far from the red-light district. He told me that when he ran for office, in 2006, he concluded "that all this pride in the prostitution windows was gratuitous—tolerance too often means indifference."

Asscher, who is also Amsterdam's vice-mayor, has proposed replacing half the brothels with fashion boutiques and art galleries. Inevitably, some people accuse Asscher of being a scold, who wants to destroy Amsterdam's uniquely liberated cultural heritage. Posters in the windows of many cafés around the Wallen protest the new restrictions. "Hands off the Wallen!" they say, or, simply, "It's enough!"

I had a sandwich with Corrie Verkerk, a city reporter, and one of those who think Asscher has gone too far. Verkerk is a journalist of the old school—tough-minded, wiry, a smoker. She lives in the Wallen and prizes its raffish atmosphere. "People who've chosen to live here like the rough edges," she said. "I don't want the city to make everything nice and neat." We took a stroll around the bars that line the rather rank-smelling canals so that I could meet some locals.

One was a plump man with creamy blond hair, who looked to be in his early seventies, and who was known to barflies as the Sailor. When I asked him about Asscher's policies, he growled. "They're turning this city into a country town—soon we'll be just like Kampen," he said, referring to a small provincial place known for its strict Calvinist ethics. I heard more or less the same thing from others in the neighborhood, including a soberly dressed old transsexual, who spoke in a refined voice and had nicely framed engravings on her walls.

That particular fear seemed implausible. Although Marcouch spoke about being inspired by New York's zero tolerance, neither he nor his social-democrat allies are remotely like Rudy Giuliani, let alone the Christian right in America who fulminate about licentious liberalism. After all, these Dutch politicians *are* liberals. Job Cohen, the mayor, compares the criminalization of marijuana to Prohibition in the United States, with the clear understanding that it doesn't work. Asscher talks about trying to reduce the sex industry, not eliminate it. And both Asscher and Cohen are proud of Amsterdam's reputation for being hospitable to immigrants. After Theo van Gogh was murdered, Cohen visited the mosques and sought to reassure Muslims that Amsterdam was their home, too. "I need to keep things together," he said, and conservatives, who saw him as an appeaser, ridiculed him for the line.

Still, his critics had identified a real dilemma: when it comes to such subjects as homosexuality, Jews, and the public role of women, immigrants are sometimes far from the liberal Dutch consensus. When I put the problem to Asscher, he replied that freedom of expression shouldn't be compromised, and added, "Gays and Jews do feel that the atmosphere has been affected in Amsterdam." Because of Islam? "Well," he said, choosing his words carefully, "youths who attack gays do this not because of Islam but because of taboos in their upbringing." So was Marcouch right, I asked, to talk about opening a gay bar in Slotervaart? "Marcouch challenged these taboos in a deliberately provocative manner," Asscher replied. "I approve of that. If things cannot be openly discussed, nothing will change."

In the past, many social democrats believed, in the multiculturalist spirit, that promoting integration was almost tantamount to neo-colonialism. Asscher takes a less sentimental view. "Of course, we cannot ask people to give up their identities," he said. "But we must at the same time stress our values. We must make our norms more explicit." Asscher ticked them off on his fingers, like a keen schoolmaster: "The rule of law, freedom of expression, non-discrimination, faith as a strictly private affair."

Amsterdam was always a relatively open city. The city hall, an ugly modern building, stands in the middle of an area that used to be mostly Jewish. It is a short walk to the grand Portuguese Synagogue, built in the seventeenth century for a wealthy Jewish community whose members had fled to Amsterdam in the late sixteenth century. To Jews, Amsterdam was known as *Mokum*—literally, "the Place."

Dutch tolerance didn't help the Jews when disaster arrived. Before the German occupation, in 1940, about ten per cent of the Amsterdam population was Jewish. After the Germans left, barely two per cent remained. The reason that most buildings in the old Jewish quarter, including the current city hall, are relatively new, compared with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century houses in the rest of central Amsterdam, is that the old buildings were abandoned after their inhabitants were taken away to be murdered. In the nineteen-seventies, the rotting housing stock was largely razed to make way for a subway that many people feel the city never needed.

The first wave of Turkish and Moroccan *gastarbeiders*, who arrived in the early nineteen-seventies, to do unskilled and semi-skilled work in industry and construction, was greeted mainly with indifference. These immigrants sent much of their wages home while surviving as well as they could in cramped boarding houses, and their presence created no serious cultural conflict. Tensions began when their wives, often illiterate village women, were allowed to settle in the Netherlands. Old working-class districts were quickly transformed into immigrant areas, with halal butcher shops and mosques. Then came 9/11, just as the first and second generations were struggling to forge new identities as Dutch Moroccans or Dutch Turks. Some were religious; many were not. For all of them, however, the spectre of global jihad pushed the issue of religious identity to the forefront.

Funda Müjde, an actress, cabaret artist, and columnist for a popular Dutch tabloid, was born in Turkey in 1961, and came to Amsterdam as a child. She told me how she was treated in her adopted country: "First, I was a foreigner, an alien. Then, after 9/11, I was suddenly a Muslim. I used to be known as a Turkish cabaret artist. After the row over the Danish cartoons, I became 'that Muslim cabaret artist.'"

But Müjde doesn't complain. She finds it easy to love Holland, she said, sunning herself in her garden outside Amsterdam, with a view of flat green pastures and grazing cows. She lives in a village now, because a traffic accident in Turkey two years ago left her wheelchair-bound, and an Amsterdam walkup was no longer possible. Perhaps, she said, loving Holland was easier for her because she still had a solid Turkish background. She speaks Turkish, and goes back to Istanbul regularly. Her children, who were born in Amsterdam, have a harder time. "They faced more discrimination," she said. "They are Dutch, but don't feel welcome here. And that makes them furious. My adolescent son goes into rages and says he doesn't want to be Dutch anymore. He wants to be Turkish."

The journalist Hassan Bahara said something similar. He told me that immigrants come with ambitions. They are willing to try anything. "But their children sense the disillusion of their parents, and become cynical about their chances," he said.

This sense of rejection is driving some well-educated Dutch-born Turks to seek their fortunes in Turkey, often to find themselves feeling like strangers there, too. Others have followed the path taken by Mohammed Bouyeri, who never felt Moroccan but looked for an alternative identity in Islamic extremism, downloading much of his violent ideology from the Internet. Suddenly, he was a member of a fraternity, a man of power. This is not a phenomenon associated with earlier waves of immigrants. The fine reputation of *Mokum* notwithstanding, Jews in Holland faced a certain degree of discrimination, and some no doubt found refuge in religious orthodoxy, but few indulged in a murderous hostility toward the country of their birth. Jews were not feared as Muslims are now.

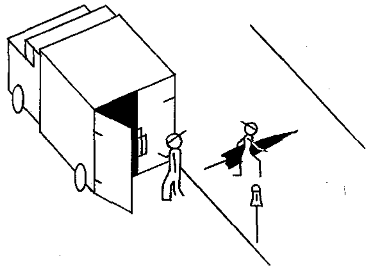
This fear is why forty per cent of Dutch voters are said to agree with the views of Geert Wilders, the right-wing provocateur with dyed blond hair, whose Freedom Party defines itself largely by its antagonism to Islam. He would like to ban the Koran, stop Muslim immigration, force women in Muslim head scarves to pay an extra tax (for "pollution of the public space"), and expel Dutch Muslims with criminal records. As he said in a speech sponsored by the Hudson Institute, "There is a tremendous danger looming, and it is very difficult to be optimistic. We might be in the final stages of the Islamization of Europe. This not only is a clear and present danger to the future of Europe itself, it is a threat to America and the sheer survival of the West."

It's unclear what Wilders and his followers fear more—Islamist extremism or the unruly behavior of young so-called Moroccans in places like Slotervaart. Their language usually conflates the two issues. And, where liberals like Cohen and Marcouch want to promote norms of social and sexual tolerance within immigrant communities, stories of immigrant intolerance have become a rhetorical staple of Holland's anti-immigrant right. Dutch nativism has thereby developed a rather unusual style of argument. One can only wonder what Wilders's conservative Israeli audience at a "Facing Jihad" conference in Jerusalem made of the following remark: "How is Amsterdam to remain the gay capital of Europe if gays are regularly beaten up by non-Western immigrants, often Muslims?" Although enthusiasm for gay life is probably limited among Wilders's supporters, they know that it has proved a useful cudgel.

To the growing number of people who fear Islam, and genuinely believe that Europe will turn into "Eurabia," Marcouch's vision of mutual accommodation is either implausible or abhorrent. They believe that an observant Muslim cannot be a good European citizen—that Dutch civic virtue is incompatible with belief in the Prophet. This is why Marcouch has been vigorously denounced for claiming that Islam should be taught in public schools. His enemies see it as an attempt to "Islamize" Amsterdam.

In Slotervaart, I asked Marcouch what he made of this accusation. He sipped from his glass of milk and said, "I believe that Muslims should integrate along with their religious identity. We must create Dutch Muslims. You can't just put children from religious families into separate Muslim schools. That adds to their segregation. By teaching different religions in public schools, you encourage children to think critically. At the same time, we should make it clear what Dutch civilization stands for." He ticked off the same tenets that Lodewijk Asscher had invoked: basic rights, the constitution, religious freedom.

And what about Wilders? Marcouch smiled. "I have told Wilders that the Dutchification of Muslims is already going on at full speed. They are so Dutch. My God, when I hear some of the things those girls in head scarves are saying! Sure, they're wrestling with modernity. But that's good. That's where their chances lie."



Fatima el-Houfi, thirty years old, is one of those young women in head scarves. She is Muslim, of Moroccan parentage, but she is also unmistakably Dutch. Sturdy, round-faced, with a ready smile, Fatima is employed by the Slotervaart district council as a social worker. When she hears about cases of domestic violence, say, or neglected children, she gets on her bicycle to see what can be done. "Ignorance is still a big problem here," she told me. "And for many it is taboo to talk to strangers about family issues." She mentioned the case of a young Turkish woman who had been physically abused by her father-in-law but was too shy, or scared, to complain openly. It all came out in secret phone calls to Fatima's office.

We bicycled together through the streets of Slotervaart, past the Piet Mondriaan School, where Theo van Gogh's murderer had been a pupil, and past a "one hundred per cent black" (that is, immigrant) primary school. We pedalled across August Allebé Square, which is notorious for violent confrontations between local youths and cops but had no air of menace. There were kebab joints and supermarkets, a school with multicolored windows. Children were out in the playgrounds, old men smoked cigarettes and chatted on park benches. I noticed one woman in a full burka, but she had the pale skin and bright-blue eyes of a typical *autochtoon*, the unlovely Dutch term for a white native-born citizen.

What problems people shared with Fatima were whispered about, mostly behind closed doors: a young woman living illegally in a sparsely furnished room with her husband and child in the small apartment of her father, who wanted them to leave; a half-Moroccan drug addict who was seeking help to pay off his debts after being released from prison; a heroin addict from the Dutch Antilles with an abusive husband and huge debts; a Turkish woman whose husband had left her with bills she couldn't pay. Fatima managed to drag these stories out of strangers with tremendous tact and professional tenacity.

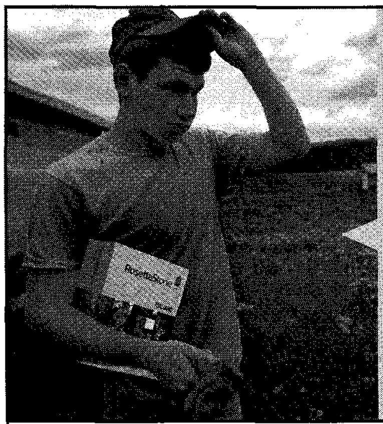
Over lunch in one of those Amsterdam cafeterias that serve halal kebabs as well as Gouda-cheese sandwiches, she told me about her ambition to start a social-welfare center in the neighborhood. She made an interesting observation about money, which appeared to be a source of greater difficulties than any struggles related to religion or identity: "The second generation of immigrants never got any pocket money. They didn't learn how to deal with money. But the third generation is being raised in the Dutch way. They will be totally different." She later sent me a photograph of herself, posing in a white head scarf with Mayor Cohen, in suit and tie, and Ahmed Marcouch, more casually dressed in an open shirt. She was proud of her association with the district boss.

The day after my bicycle ride with Fatima, I met another person of Moroccan origin, in a different part of Slotervaart—on the same lake where Marcouch had blessed the Gay Pride Parade. He was a student named Mourad Ezzoubaa, majoring in business at the University of Amsterdam. Tall and wiry, with a shaved head, Mourad spends his spare time as a sports coach for kids in the area. Like Marcouch, he had spent part of his childhood in Morocco.

I asked him what he thought of Marcouch and the gay issue. "He has brought us some discredit with his remarks," Mourad replied, squinting at the lake, where the children were learning to sail. "The media are always presenting anti-gay attitudes here as something cultural. Well, if you talked about opening a gay bar in a provincial Dutch town, young men would also protest." Street violence, too, had little to do with cultural differences, in his view. But then he gave an explanation that revealed certain differences nonetheless: "Parents try to control their kids with harsh discipline, but the kids know they can call the police to complain about parental abuse. So the parents give up. The kids then turn to the streets for their education. They get involved in criminal activities. That's what's happening in Slotervaart."

Mourad started out in a mixed primary school. Later, he was a schoolmate of Mohammed Bouyeri's at the Mondriaan School, but he didn't remember Bouyeri at all. He hadn't much enjoyed his "black school" experience. "This is no melting pot," he said, talking about Slotervaart. "This is a salad bowl, with each community—Dutch, Turkish, Moroccan—sticking to themselves. I don't like that. Guys who've lived only in a segregated area don't know how to work with others. They have to be taught how to grab their opportunities."

Still, Mourad sees that even Slotervaart is changing. He thinks that the younger generation is beginning to feel less victimized. "They understand better how Dutch society works," he said. "They don't even feel especially threatened by the likes of Geert Wilders. We know there must be room for all opinions, even *his*." Mourad smiled, as the kids under his charge made it to shore. He shooed them toward the locker rooms. "You know, I'm proud to be an Amsterdammer," he said. "My wife comes from Rotterdam. Things are much worse there." Spoken like a true Dutchman. ♦



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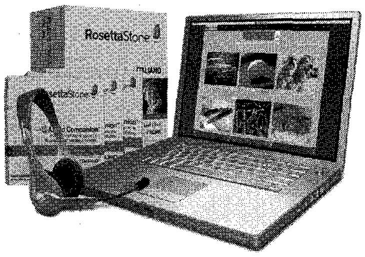

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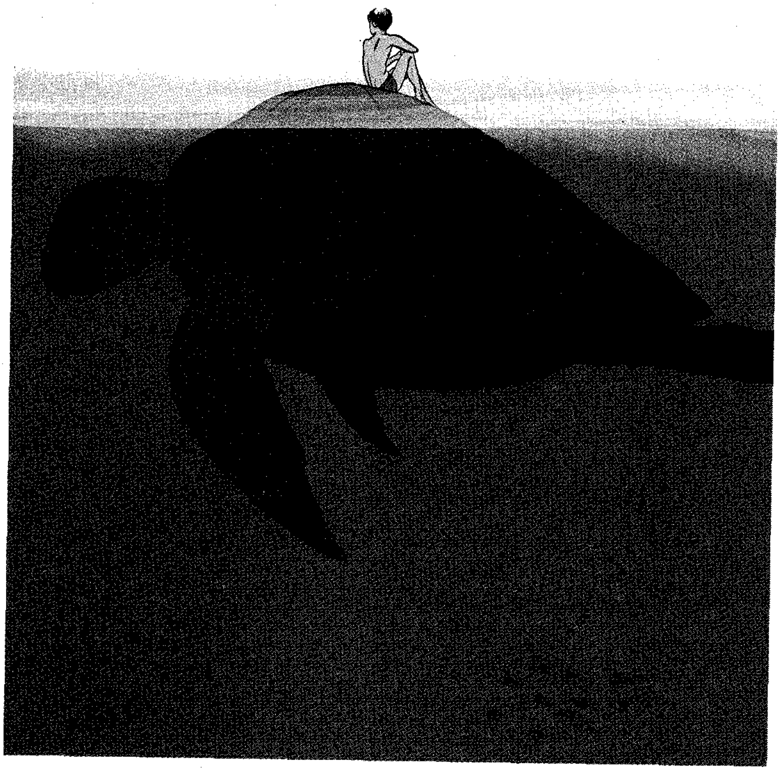
LOGGERHEADS

Sea turtles and me.

BY DAVID SEDARIS



JILLIAN TAMAKI

The thing about Hawaii, at least the part that is geared toward tourists, is that it's exactly what it promises to be. Step off the plane and someone places a lei around your neck, as if it were something you had earned—an Olympic medal for sitting on your ass. Raise a hand above your shoulder and, no matter where you are, a drink will appear: something served in a hollowed-out pineapple, or perhaps in a coconut that's been sawed in half. Just like in the time before glasses! you think.

Volcanic craters, waterfalls, and those immaculate beaches—shocking things when you're coming from Europe. At the spot that Hugh and I go to in Normandy, you'll find, in place of sand, speckled stones the size of potatoes. The water runs from glacial to heart attack and is tinted the color of iced tea. Then there's all the stuff floating in it: not man-made garbage but sea garbage—scum and bits of plant life, all of it murky and rotten-smelling.

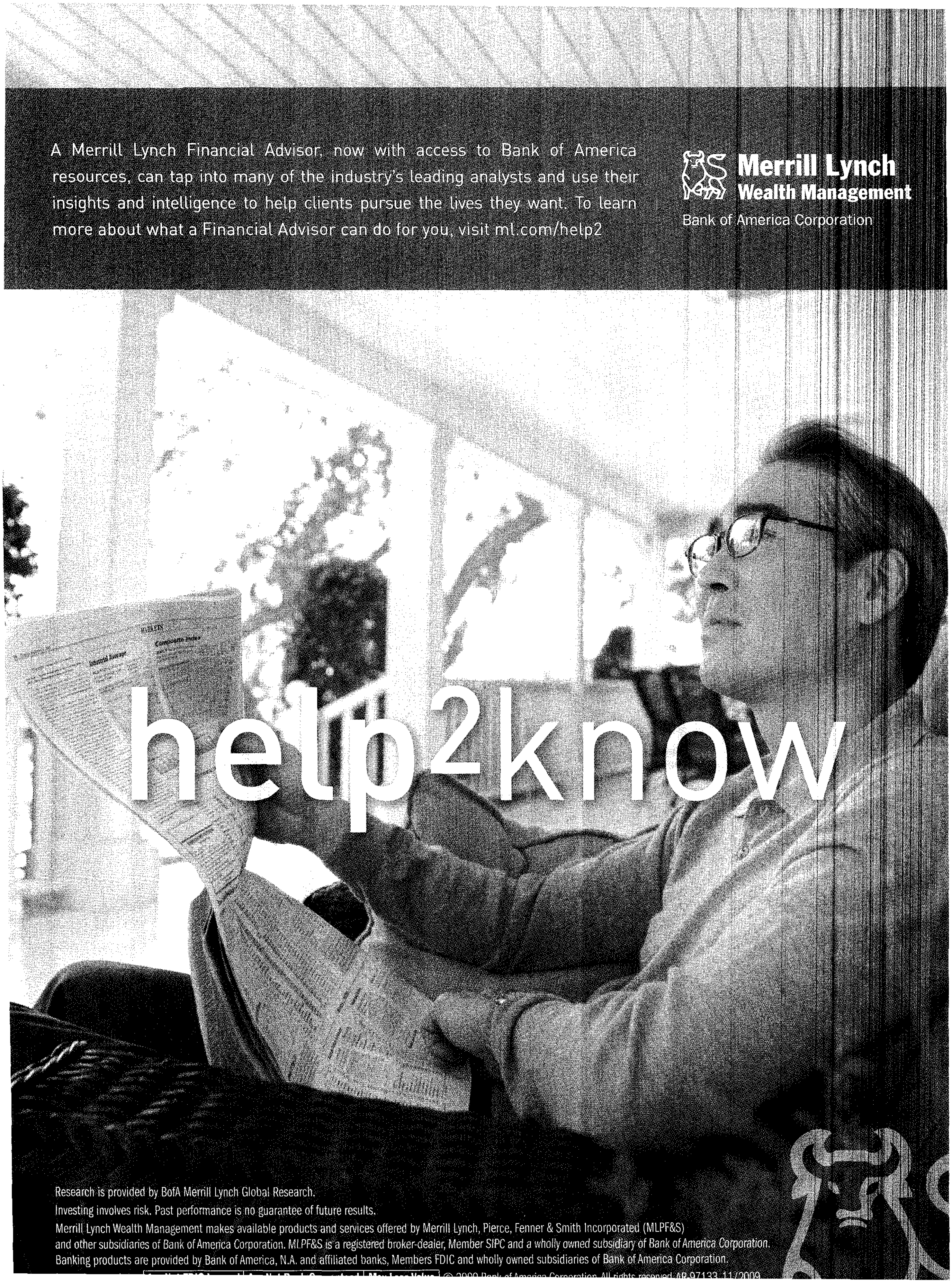
The beaches in Hawaii look as if they'd been bleached; that's how white the sand is. The water is warm—even in winter—and so clear that you can see not just your toes but the corns cleaving, barnacle-like, to the sides of them. On Maui, one November, Hugh and I went swimming, and turned to find a gigantic sea turtle coming up between us. As gentle as a cow she was, and with a cow's dopey, almost lovesick expression on her face. That, to me, was worth the entire trip, worth my entire life, practically. For to witness majesty, to find yourself literally touched by it—isn't that what we've all been waiting for?

I had a similar experience a few years later, and again with Hugh. We were in Japan, walking through a national forest in a snowstorm, when a monkey the height of a bar stool brushed against us. His fur was a dull silver, the color of dishwater, but he had this beet-red face, set in a serious, almost solemn expression. We saw it full on when he turned to briefly look at us. Then he shrugged and ambled off over a footbridge.

"Jesus Christ!" I said. Because it was too much: the forest, the snowstorm, and now this. Monkeys were an attraction in that part of the country. We expected to see them at some point, but I thought they'd be fenced in. As with the sea turtle, part of the thrill was the feeling of being accepted, which is to say, not feared. It allowed you to think that you and this creature had a special relationship, a juvenile thought, but one that brings with it a definite comfort. Well, monkeys like me, I'd find myself thinking during the next few months, whenever I felt lonely or unappreciated. Just as, in the months following our trip to Hawaii, I thought of the sea turtle. With her, though, my feelings were a bit more complicated, and, instead of believing that we had bonded, I'd wonder that she could ever have forgiven me.

The thing between me and sea turtles started in the late sixties, and involved my best friend from grade school, a boy I'll call Shaun (some of the names in this story have been changed), who lived down the street from me in Raleigh. What brought us together was a love of nature, or, more specifically, of catching things, and unintentionally killing them. We started when I was in the fourth grade, which would have made me ten, I guess. It's different for everyone, but at that age, though I couldn't have said that I was gay, I knew that I was not like the other boys in my class or my Scout troop. While they welcomed male company, I shrank from it, dreaded it, feeling like someone forever trying to pass, someone who would eventually be found out, and be expelled from polite society. Is this how a normal boy would swing his arms? I'd ask myself, standing before the full-length mirror in my parents' bedroom. Is this how he'd laugh? Is this what he would find funny? It was like doing an English accent. The more concentrated the attempt, the more self-conscious and unconvincing I became.

With Shaun, though, I could almost be myself. This didn't mean that we were alike, only that he wasn't paying that much attention. Childhood, for him, seemed something to be endured, passed through like a tiresome stretch of



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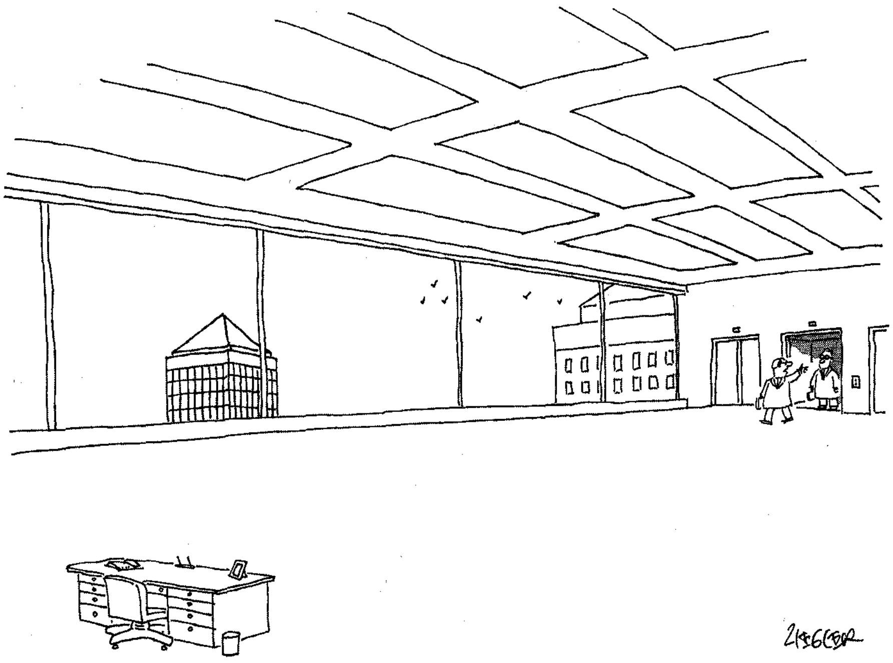


"So long, Ed. This is my floor."

road. Ahead of this was the good stuff, and, looking at him from time to time, at the way he had of staring off, of boring a hole into the horizon, you got the sense that he could not only imagine it but see it: this great, grownup life, waiting on the other side of sixteen.

Apart from an interest in wildlife, the two of us shared an identity as transplants. My family was from the North, and the Taylors were from the Midwest. Shaun's father, Hank, was a psychiatrist, and sometimes gave his boys and me tests, the type for which there were, he assured us, "no right answers." He and his wife were younger than my parents, and they seemed it, not just in their dress but in their eclectic tastes—records by Donovan and Moby Grape shelved among the Schubert. Their house had real hardcover books in it, and you often saw them lying open on the sofa, the words still warm from being read.

In a neighborhood of stay-at-home moms, Shaun's mother worked. A public-health nurse, she was the one you went to if you woke up with yellow eyes, or had jammed a piece of caramel corn too far into your ear. "Oh, you're fine," Jean would say, for that was what she wanted us to call her, not Mrs. Taylor. With her high cheekbones and ever so slightly turned-down mouth, she brought to mind a young Katharine Hepburn. Other mothers might be pretty, might, in their twenties or early thirties, *pause* at beauty, but Jean was clearly parked there for a lifetime. You'd see her in her flower bed, gardening gloves hanging from the waistband of her slacks like someone clawing to get out, and you just had to wish she was your mom instead.

The Taylor children had inherited their mother's good looks, especially Shaun. Even as a kid, he seemed at home in his skin—never cute, just handsome, blond hair like a curtain drawn over half his face. The eye that looked out from the uncurtained side was cornflower blue, and excelled at spotting wounded or vulnerable animals. While the other boys in our neighborhood played touch football in the street, Shaun and I searched the woods behind our houses. I drew the line at snakes, but anything else was brought home, and imprisoned in our ten-gallon aquariums. Lizards, toads, baby birds: they all got the same diet—raw hamburger meat—and, with few exceptions, they all died within a few weeks.

"Menu-wise, it might not hurt you to branch out a little," my mother once said, in reference to my captive luna moth. It was the size of a paperback novel, a beautiful mint green, but not much interested in ground chuck. "Maybe you could feed it some, I don't know, flowers or something."

Like she knew.

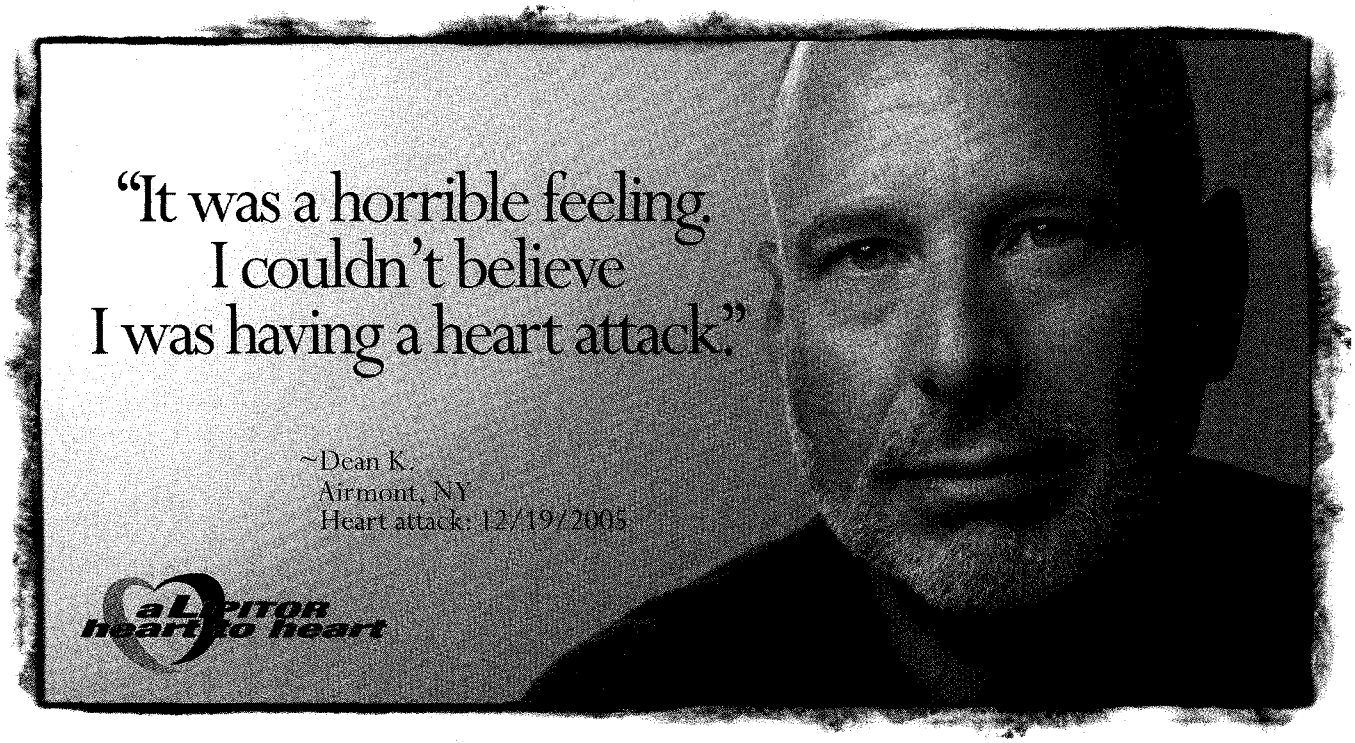
The best-caught creature belonged to Shaun's younger brother, Chris, who'd found an injured flying squirrel and kept him, uncaged, in his bedroom. The thing was no bigger than a hamster, and when he glided from the top bunk to the dresser his body flattened out, making him look like an empty hand puppet. The only problem was the squirrel's disposition, his one-track mind. You wanted him to cuddle, or to ride sentry on your shoulder, but he refused to relax. *I've got to get out of here,* you could sense him thinking, as he clawed, desperate and wild-eyed, at the windowpane, or tried to squeeze himself underneath the door. He made it out eventually, and though we all hoped he'd return for meals, and become a kind of part-time pet, he never did.

Not long after the squirrel broke free, Jean took her boys and me for a weekend on the North Carolina coast. It was mid-October, the start of the sixth grade, and the water was too chilly to swim in. On the Sunday that we were to head back home, Shaun and I got up at dawn and took a walk with our nets. We were hunting for ghost crabs when, in the distance, we made out these creatures, moving blockily, like windup toys on an unsteady surface. On closer inspection, we saw that they were baby sea turtles, dozens of them, digging out from under the sand, and stumbling toward the ocean.

An adult might have carried them into the surf, or held at bay the predatory gulls, but we were twelve, so while I scooped the baby turtles into a pile, Shaun ran back and got the trash cans from our hotel room.

We might have walked off with the whole lot, but they seemed pretty miserable, jumbled atop one another. Thus, in the end, we took only ten, which meant five apiece.

The great thing about the sea turtles, as opposed to, say, flying squirrels, was that they would grow exponentially—meaning, what, fifty, a hundred times their original size? When we got them, each one called to mind a plastic coin



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purse, the oval sort handed out by banks and car dealerships. Then there were the flippers and, of course, the heads, which were bald and beaky, like a newly hatched bird's. Since the death of a traumatized mole pried from the mouth of our cat, Samantha, my aquarium had sat empty and was therefore ready for some new tenants. I filled it with a jug of ocean water that I'd brought from the beach, then threw in a conch shell and a couple of sand dollars, to make it more homey. The turtles swam the short distance from one end of the tank to the other, and then they batted at the glass with their flippers, unable to understand that this was it—the end of the road. What they needed, it seemed, was something to eat.

"Mom, do we have any raw hamburger?"

Looking back, you'd think that someone would have said something—sea turtles, for God's sakes!—but maybe they weren't endangered yet. Animal cruelty hadn't been invented, either. The thought that a non-human being had *physical* feelings, let alone the wherewithal to lose hope, was outlandish and alien, like thinking that paper had relatives. Then, too, when it comes to eliciting empathy, it's the back of the line for reptiles and amphibians, creatures with, face it, not much in the way of a personality. Even giving them names didn't help, as playing with Shelly was no different from playing with Pokyhontus; "playing," in this case, amounting to placing them on my desk and watching them toddle over the edge.

It was good to know that in the house down the street Shaun's turtles weren't faring much better. The hamburger meat we'd put in our aquariums went uneaten, and within a short time it spoiled, and started stinking up our rooms. I emptied my tank, and in the absence of seawater I made my own, with plain old tap water and salt.

"I'm not sure that that's going to work," my mother said. She was standing in my doorway with a cigarette in one hand and an ashtray in the other. Recent experiments with a home-frosting kit had dried out and broken her already brittle hair. What was left she'd covered with a scarf, a turquoise one, that looked great when she had a tan but not so great when she didn't. "Doesn't ocean water have nutrients in it or something?"

"I dunno."

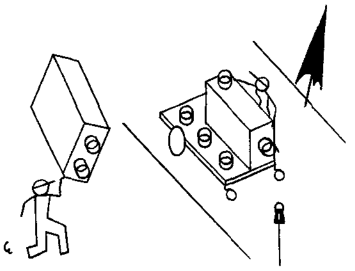
She looked at the turtles, unhappily dragging themselves across my bedspread. "Well, if you want to find out, I'm taking Lisa to the library this Saturday."

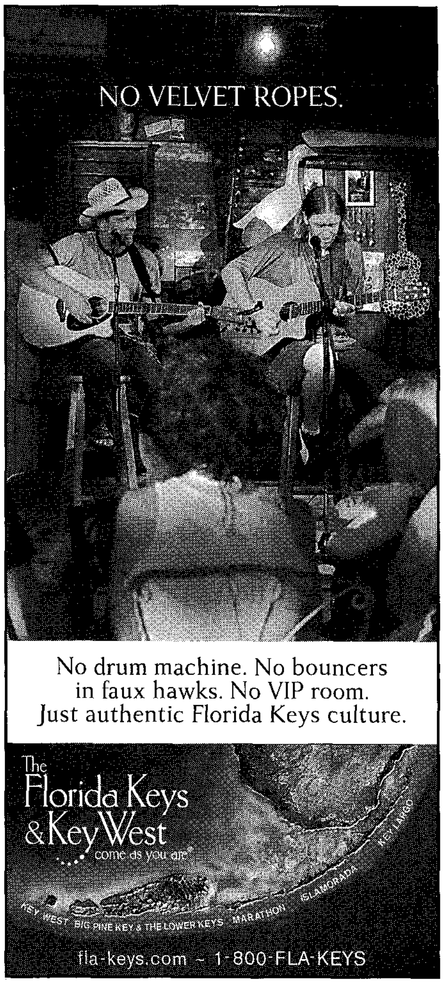
I'd hoped to spend my weekend outside, but then it rained, and my father hogged the TV for one of his football games. It was either go to the library or stay home and die of boredom, so I got into the car, groaning at the unfairness of it all. My mother dropped my sister and me downtown, and then she went to do some shopping, promising to return in a few hours.

It wasn't much to look at, our public library. I later learned that it used to be a department store, and that made sense: the floor-to-ceiling windows were right for mannequins, and you could easily imagine dress shirts where the encyclopedias were, wigs in place of the magazines. I remember that in the basement there were two rest rooms, one marked "Men" and the other marked "Gentleman." Inside each was a toilet, a sink, and a paper-towel dispenser, meaning that whichever you chose you got pretty much the same treatment. Thus, it came down to how you saw yourself: as regular, or fancy. On the day I went to research turtles, I saw myself as fancy, and so I opened the door marked "Gentleman." What happened next happened very quickly. Two men, both black, turned their heads in my direction. One was standing with his pants and underwear pulled down past his knees, and as he bent to yank them up the other man, who'd been kneeling before him, and who also had his pants lowered, covered his face with his hand, and let out a little cry.

"Oh," I told them. "I'm sorry."

I backed, shaken, out of the room, and just as the door had closed behind me it swung open again. Then the pair spilled out, that flying-squirrel look in their eyes. The stairs were at the end of a short hall, and they took them two at





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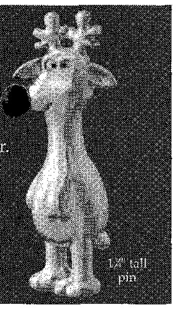

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a time, the slower man turning his head, just briefly, and looking at me as if I held a gun. When I saw that he was afraid of me, I felt powerful. Then I wondered how I might use that power.

My first instinct was to tell on them—not because I wanted the two punished but because I would have liked the attention. "Are you all right?" the librarian would have asked. "And these were Negroes, you say? Quick, somebody, get this young man a glass of water or, better yet, a Coke. Would you like a Coke while we wait for the police?"

And, in my feeblest voice, I would have said, "Yes."

Then again, it could so easily backfire. The men were doing something indecent, and recognizing it as such meant that I had an eye for it. That I, too, was suspect. And wasn't I?

In the end, I told no one. Not even Lisa.

"So did you find out what kind of turtles they are?" my mother asked as we climbed back into the car.

"Sea turtles," I told her.

"Well, we *know* that."

"No, I mean, that's what they're called, 'sea turtles.'"

"And what do they eat?"

I looked out the rain-streaked window. "Hamburger."

My mother sighed. "Have it your way."

It took a few weeks for my first turtle to die. The water in the tank had again grown murky with spoiled, uneaten beef, but there was something else as well, something I couldn't begin to identify. The smell that developed in the days after Halloween, this deep, swampy funk, was enough to make your eyes water. It was as if the turtles' very souls were rotting, yet still they gathered in the corner of their tank, determined to find the sea. At night, I would hear their flippers against the glass, and think about the Negroes in the Gentleman's room, wondering what would become of them—what, by extension, would become of me? Would I, too, have to live on the run? Afraid of even a twelve-year-old?

One Friday in early November, my father paid a rare visit to my room. In his hand was a glass of gin, his standard, after-work cocktail, mixed with a little water, and garnished with a lemon peel. I normally liked the smell of it, but today the aquarium won. He regarded it briefly and, wincing at the stench, removed two tickets from his jacket pocket. "They're for a game," he told me.

"A game?"

"Football," he said. "I thought we could go tomorrow afternoon."

"But tomorrow I have to write a report."

"Write it on Sunday."

I'd never expressed any interest in football. Never played it with the kids on the street, never watched it on TV, never touched the helmet I'd received the previous Christmas. "Why not take Lisa?" I asked.

"Because you're my son, that's why."

I looked at the holocaust taking place in my aquarium. "Do I have to?"

If I were to go to a game today, I'd certainly find something to enjoy: the food, the noise, the fans marked up with paint. It would be an experience. At the time, though, it threw me into a panic. Which team am I supposed to care about? I asked myself as we settled into our seats. How am I supposed to react if somebody scores a point? The thing about sports, at least for guys, is that nobody ever defines the rules, not even in gym class. Asking what a penalty means is like asking who Jesus was. It's one of those things you're just supposed to know, and if you don't there's something seriously wrong with you.

Two of the popular boys from my school were standing against a railing a few rows ahead of us, and when I stupidly pointed them out to my father he told me to go and say hello to them.

How to explain that looking at them, even from this distance, was pushing it. Addressing them, it followed, was completely out of the question. People had their places, and to not understand that, to act in violation of it, demoted you from a nature nut to something even lower, a complete untouchable, basically. "That's all right," I said. "They don't really know who I am."

"Aw, baloney. Go over and talk to them."

"No, really."

"Do you want me to drag you over there?"

As I dug in, I thought of the turtles.

All they'd ever wanted was to live in the ocean—that was it, their entire wish list, and instead I'd decided they'd be better off in my bedroom. Just as my dad had decided that I'd be better off at the football game. If I could have returned them to the beach, I would have, though I knew it was already too late. In another few days they would start going blind. Then their shells would soften, and they'd just sort of melt away, like soap.

"Are you going over there or aren't you?" my dad said.

When the last turtle died and was pitched into the woods behind my house, Shaun and I took up bowling, the only sport I was ever half decent at. The Western Lanes was a good distance away, and when our parents wouldn't drive us we rode our bikes, me with a transistor radio attached by rubber bands to my handlebars. We were just thinking of buying our own bowling shoes, when Shaun's mother and father separated. Hank took an apartment in one of the new complexes, and a few months later, not yet forty years old, he died.

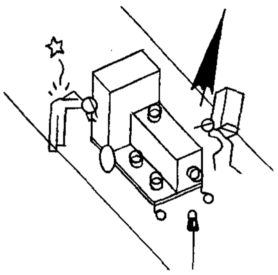
"Died of what?" I asked.

"His heart stopped beating" was the answer Shaun gave me.

"Well, sure," I said. "But doesn't *every* dead person's heart stop beating? There must have been something else going on."

"His heart stopped beating."

Following the funeral, there was a reception at the Taylors' house. Shaun and I spent most of it on the deck off his living room, him firing his BB gun into the woods with that telescopic look in his eye. After informing me that his father's heart had stopped beating, he never said another word about him. I never saw Shaun cry, or buckle at the knees, or do any of the things that I would have done. Drama-wise, it was the chance of a lifetime, but he wasn't having any of it. From the living room, I could hear my father talking to Jean. "What with Hank gone, the boys are going to need a positive male influence in their lives," he said. "That being the case I'll be happy to, well, happy to—"



"Ignore them," my mother cut in. "Just like he does with his own damn kids."

And Jean laughed. "Oh, Sharon."

Eighteen years passed before I learned what had really happened to Shaun's father. By then I was living in Chicago. My parents were still in Raleigh, and several times a week I'd talk to my mother on the phone. I don't remember how the subject came up, but after she told me I was stunned.

"Did Shaun know?" I asked.

"I'm sure he did," my mother said, and although I hadn't seen or spoken to him since high school, I couldn't help but feel a little betrayed. If you can't tell your best friend that your dad essentially drank himself to death, who *can* you tell? It's a lot to hold in at that age, but then I guess we all had our secrets.

It was after talking to my mom on the phone that I finally went to the library and looked up those turtles: loggerheads is what they were called. When mature, they can measure three and a half feet long. A female might reach four hundred pounds, and, of all the eggs she lays in a lifetime, only one in a thousand will make it to adulthood. Pretty slim odds when, by "making it," you mean simply surviving.

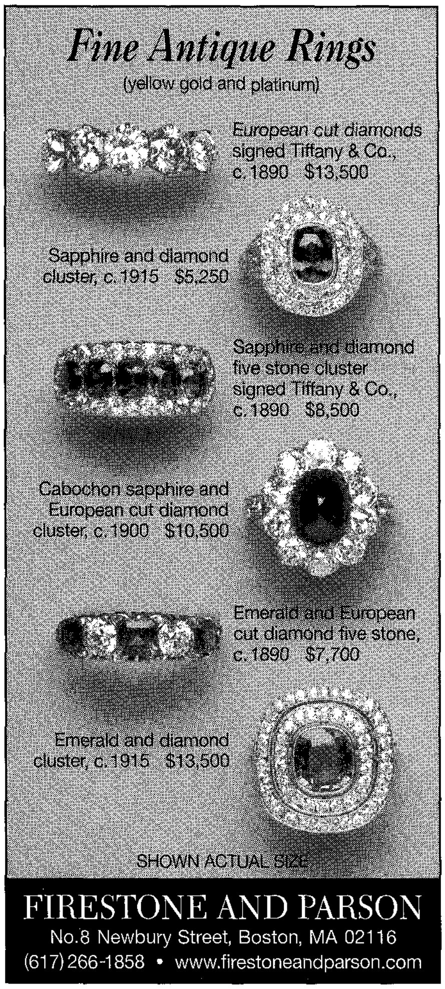
Before the reception ended that day, Shaun handed his BB gun to me. My father was watching from the living-room window, and intercepted me just as I raised it to my shoulder.

"Oh, no you don't. You're going to put somebody's eye out."

"Somebody like a bird?" I said. "We're firing into the woods, not into the house."

"I don't give a damn where you're aiming."

I handed the rifle back to Shaun, and, as he brushed the hair from his eyes and peered down the scope, I tried to see what I imagined he did: a life on the other side of this, something better, perhaps even majestic, waiting for us to grow into it. ♦



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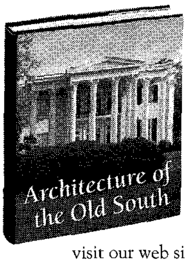

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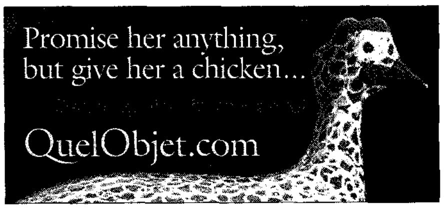

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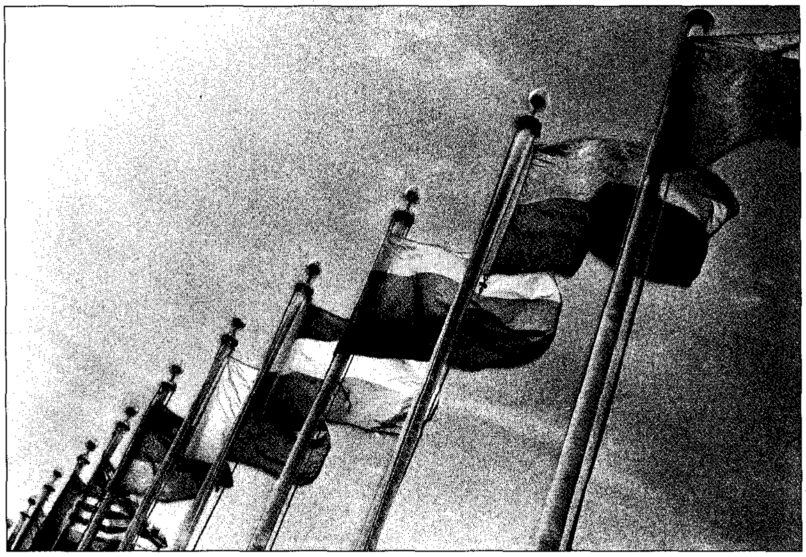


PORTFOLIO BY PLATON

PORTRAITS OF POWER

In 1976, Richard Avedon went to Washington to photograph Henry Kissinger. As Avedon was leading him to his mark, Kissinger said, "Be kind to me."

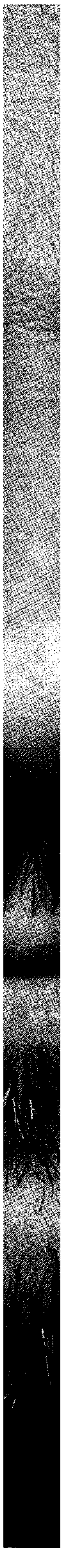
Artists have been making portraits of the mighty for centuries—from Velázquez's Philip IV to Lucian Freud's Elizabeth II—and the act of portrait-making can leave the royal or the tyrant, the President or the diplomat with a sudden feeling of disequilibrium, of a transfer of power. Avedon knew that Kissinger was trying to manipulate him, but what, exactly, did he want? "Did Kissinger want to look wiser, warmer, more sincere than he suspected he was?" Avedon wrote later. "Isn't it trivializing and demeaning to make someone look wise, noble (which is easy to do), or even conventionally beautiful when the thing itself is so much more complicated, contradictory, and, therefore, fascinating?"

This past September, when nearly all the world's leaders were in New York for a meeting of the United Nations, Platon, a staff photographer for this magazine, set up a tiny studio off the floor of the General Assembly, and tried to hustle as many of them in front of his lens as possible. For months, members of the magazine's staff had been writing letters to various governments and embassies, but the project was a five-day-long improvisation, with Platon doing his best to lure the likes of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hugo Chávez, and Muammar Qaddafi to his camera.

And so what did the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, ask the photographer before the shutter clicked? "Platon," he said, "make me look good."

History is full of leaders who cannot bear the result of their sittings. Winston Churchill publicly praised a portrait of him by Graham Sutherland, but soon decided that it made him look senile. His wife, Clementine, destroyed it. Usually, it seems, politicians seek out a portrait artist at the beginning of their career. On February 27, 1860, the day he delivered his career-defining speech at Cooper Union, Abraham Lincoln walked over to Mathew Brady's studio and had his picture taken. The greatest of American political lives had begun.

But the anxiety persists. While political theatre went on inside the General Assembly, Netanyahu kept stopping by Platon's makeshift studio and repeated his request: "Make me look good." ♦



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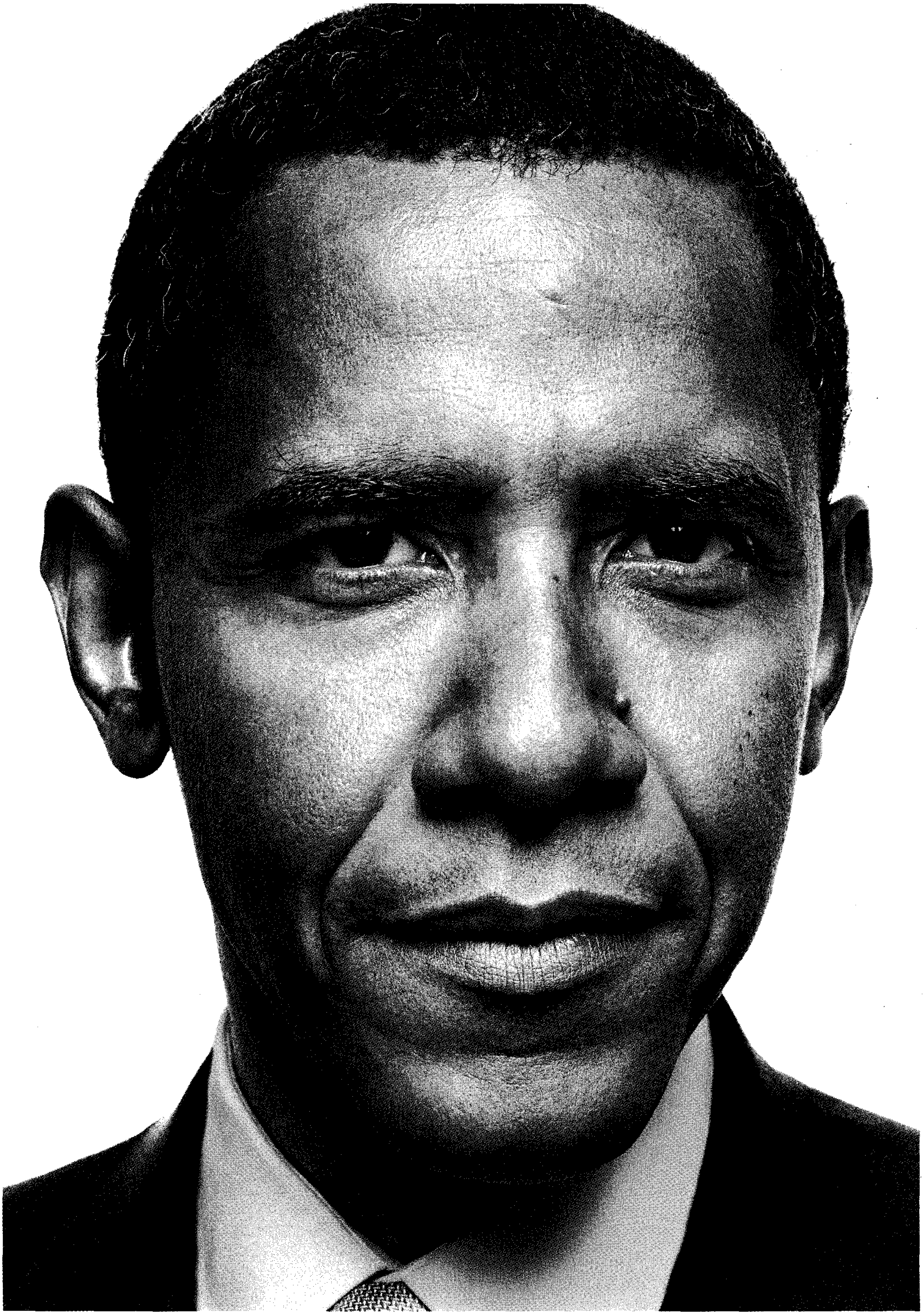
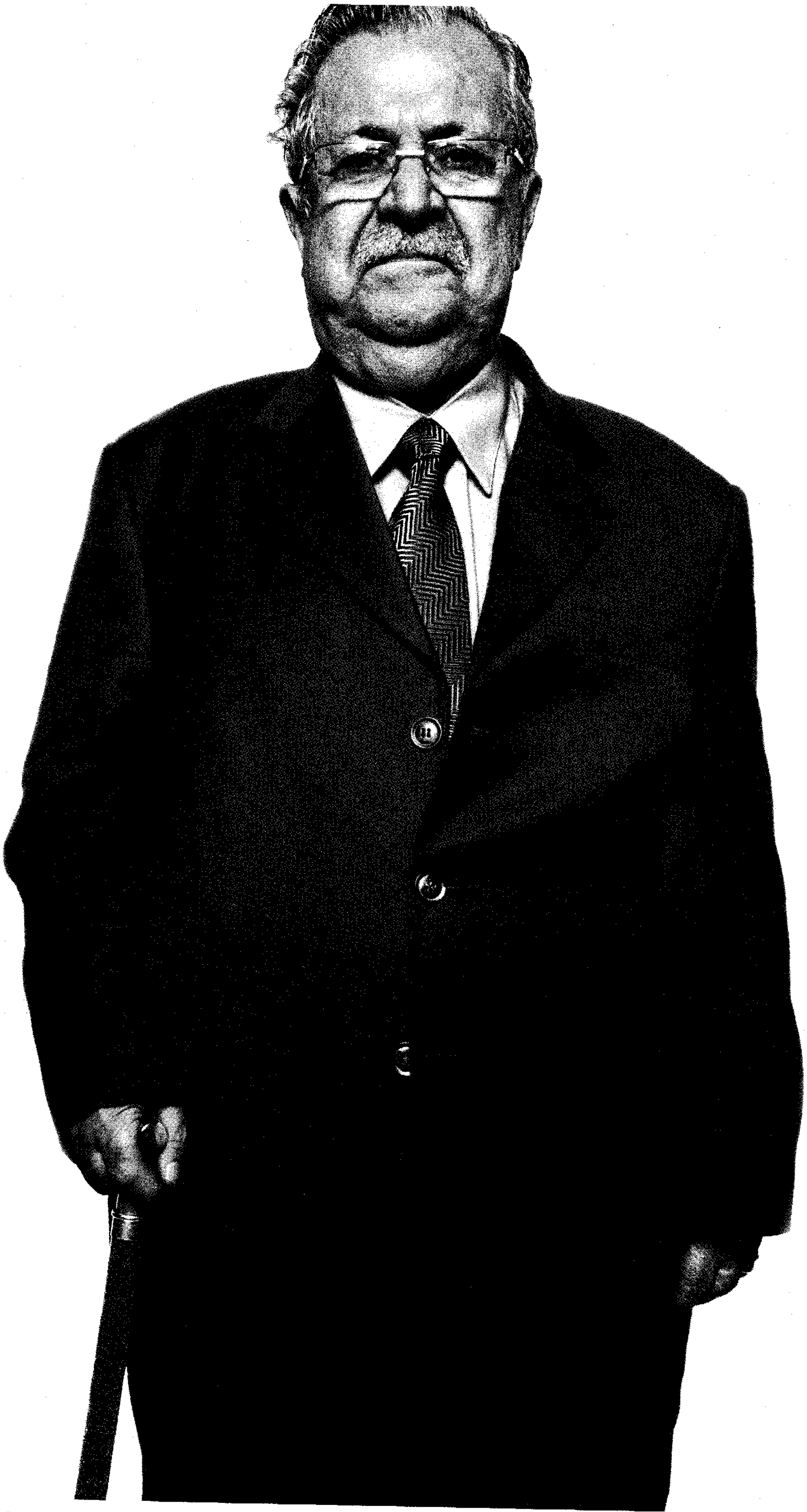


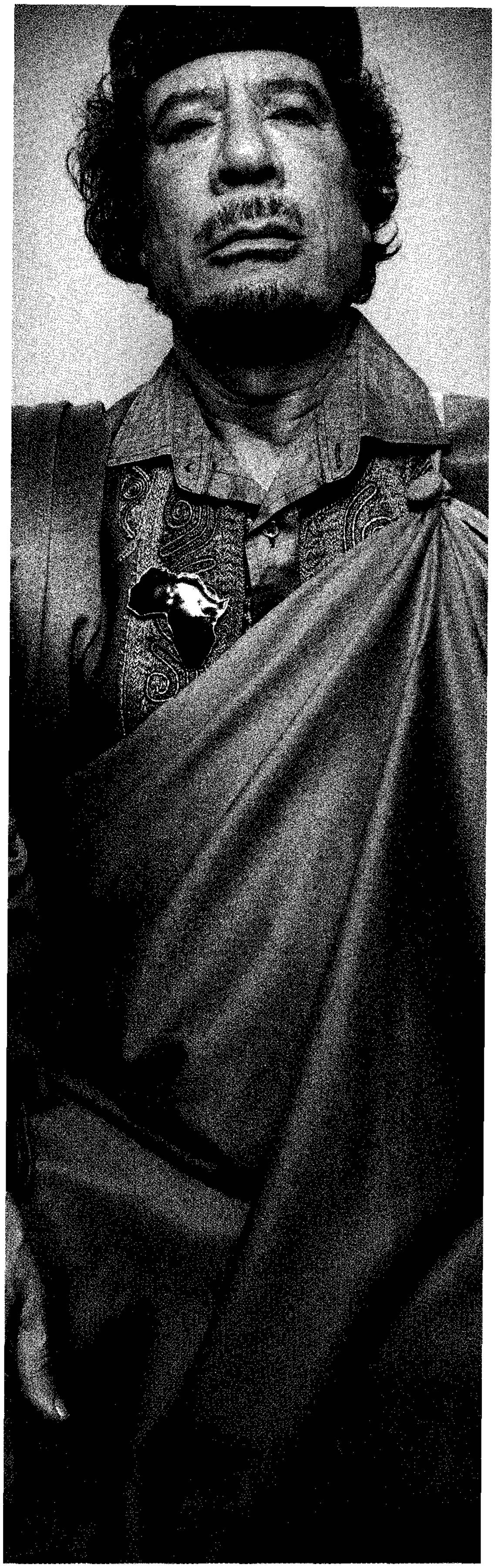
Barack Obama, the President of the United States, photographed in Chicago, in 2006. He was born on August 4, 1961.

Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel. Born on October 21, 1949, he began his current term of office on March 31, 2009.

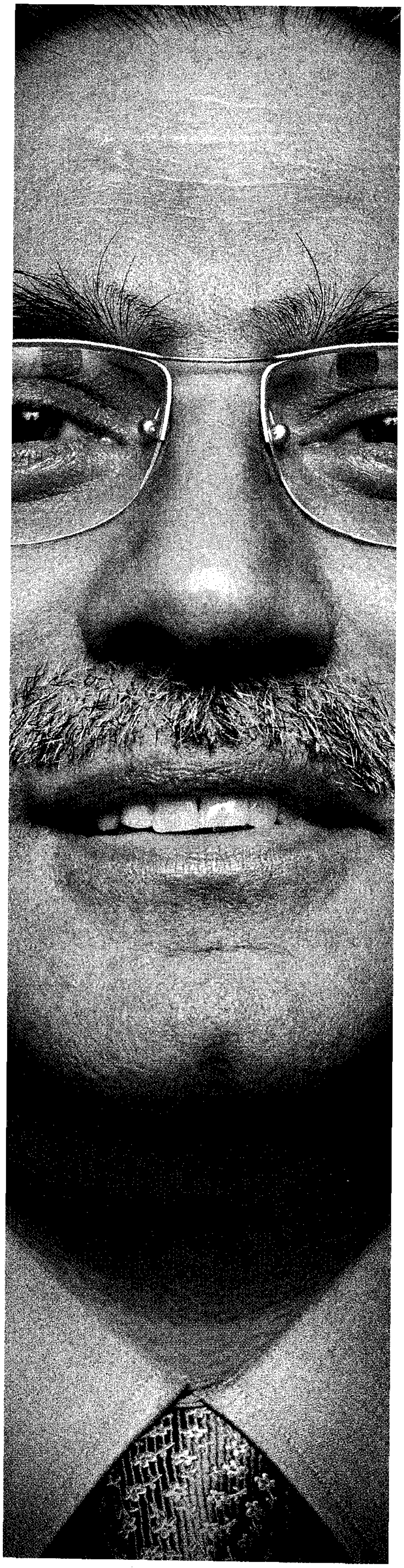
Mahmoud Abbas, the President of the Palestinian Authority, was born on March 26, 1935, and assumed office on January 15, 2005.



Jalal Talabani, the President of Iraq. Talabani was born on November 12, 1933, and was sworn in on April 7, 2005.



r of the Revolution, was born in June, 1942, and



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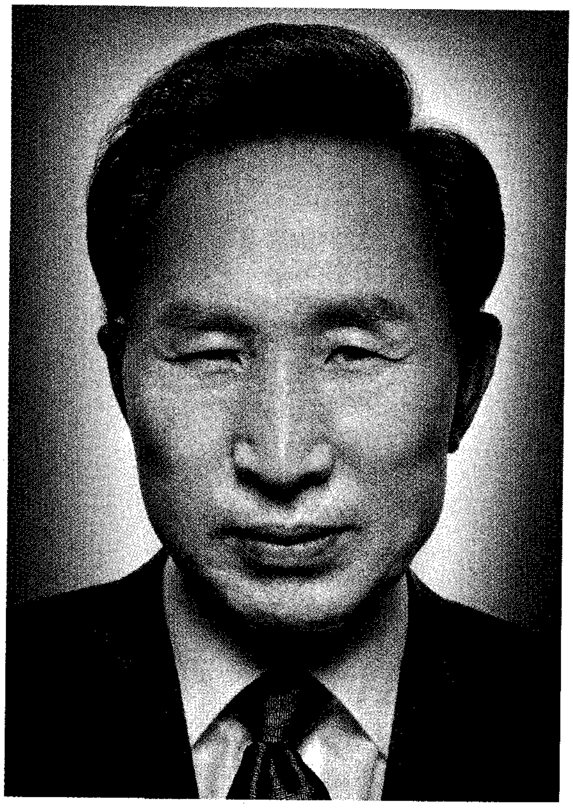
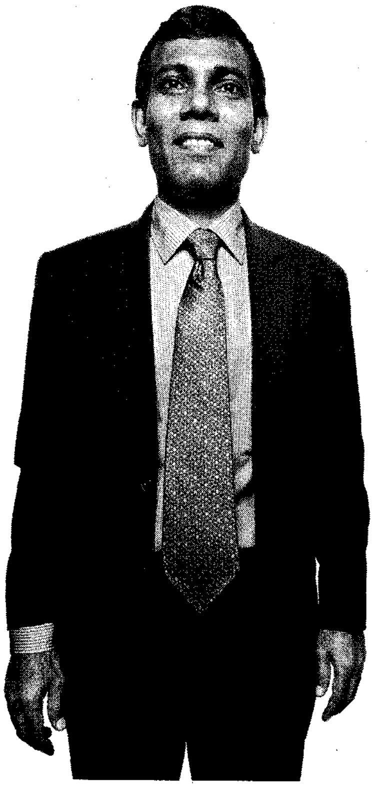
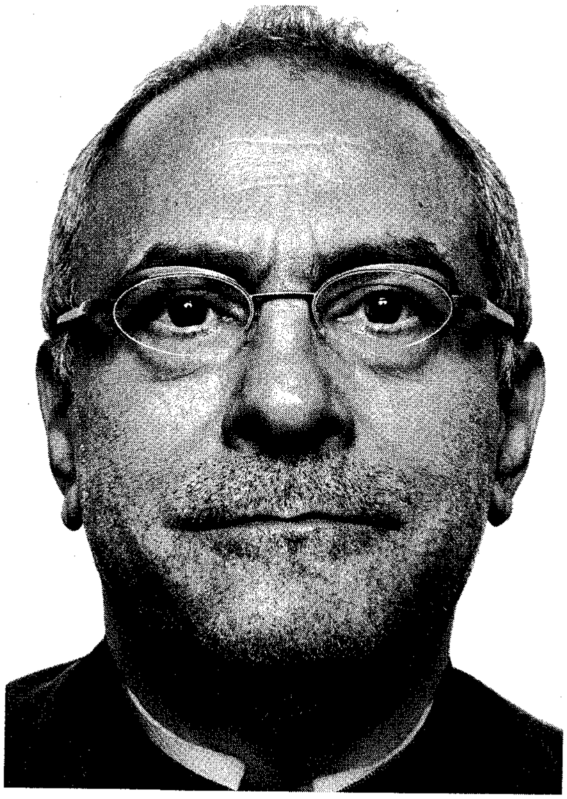
Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. He was born on June 13, 1944, and assumed office on January 1, 2007.



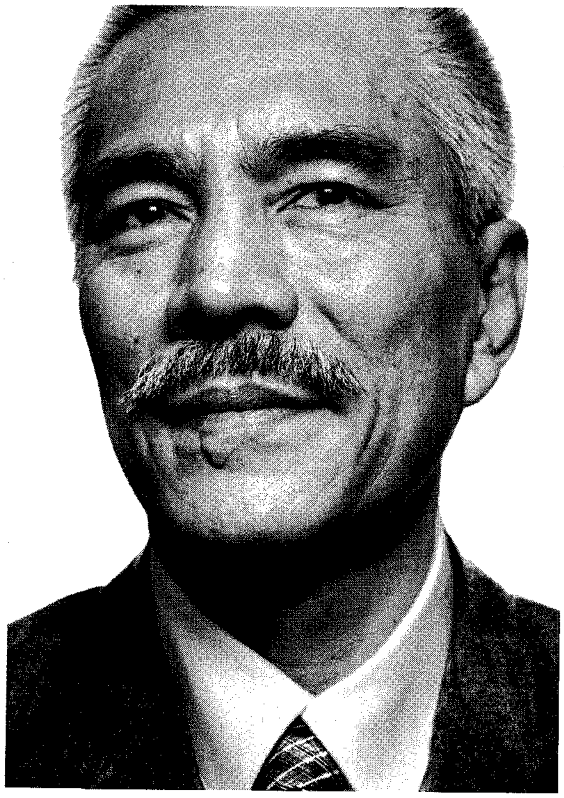
Lee Myung-bak, the President of South Korea, was born on December 19, 1941, and took office in 2008.



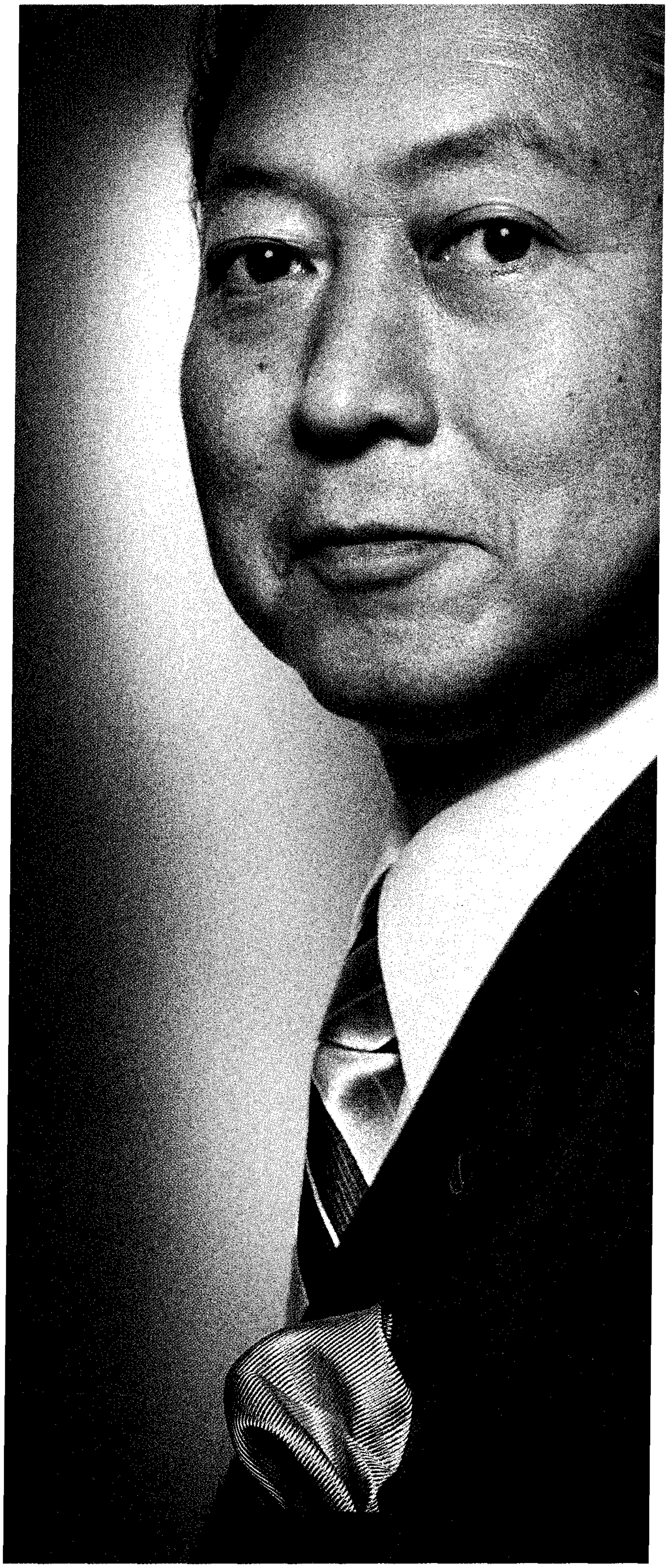
Mohamed Nasheed, the President of the Maldives. Born on May 17, 1967, he took office in 2008.



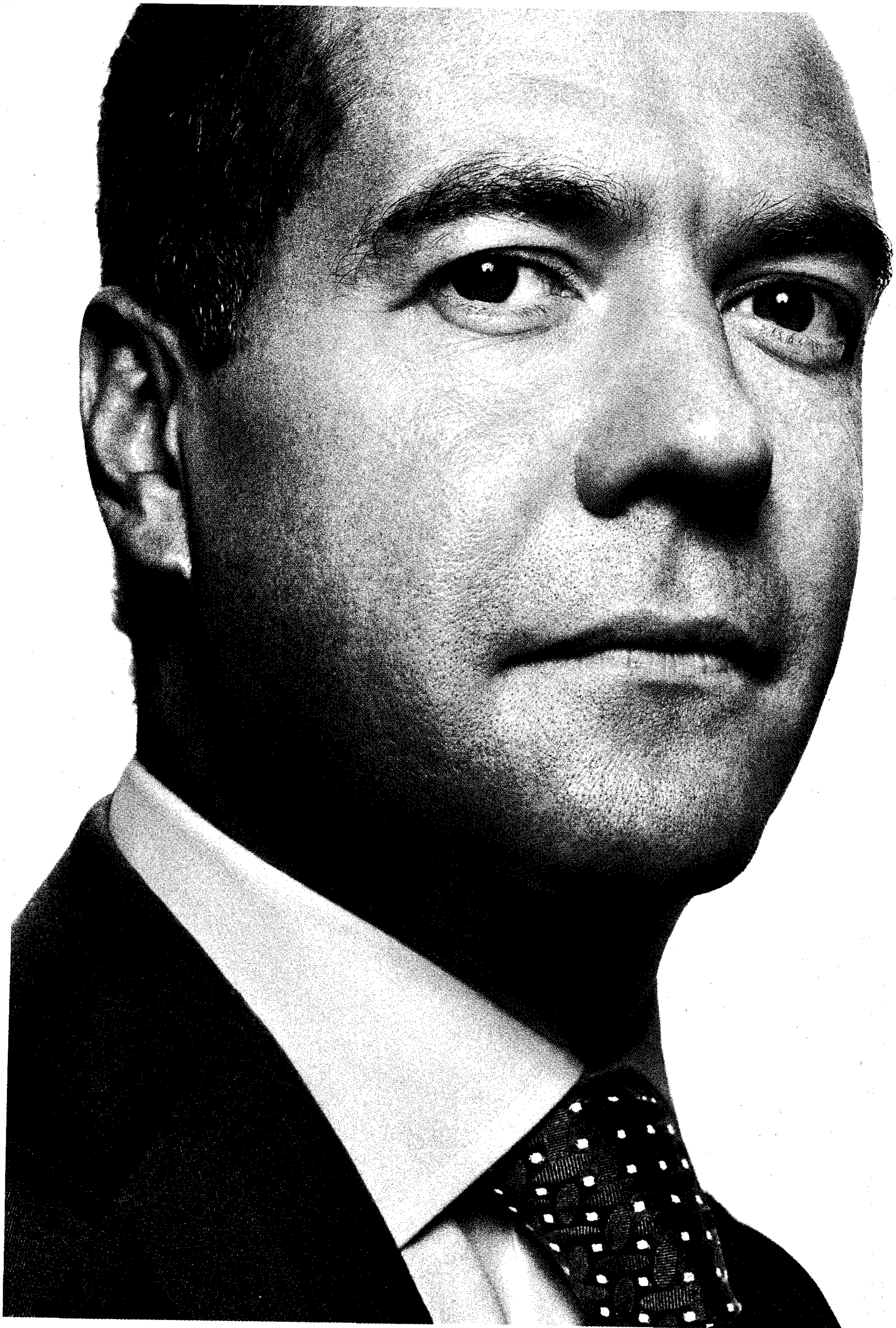
José Ramos-Horta, the President of East Timor. Born on December 26, 1949, he assumed office in 2007.



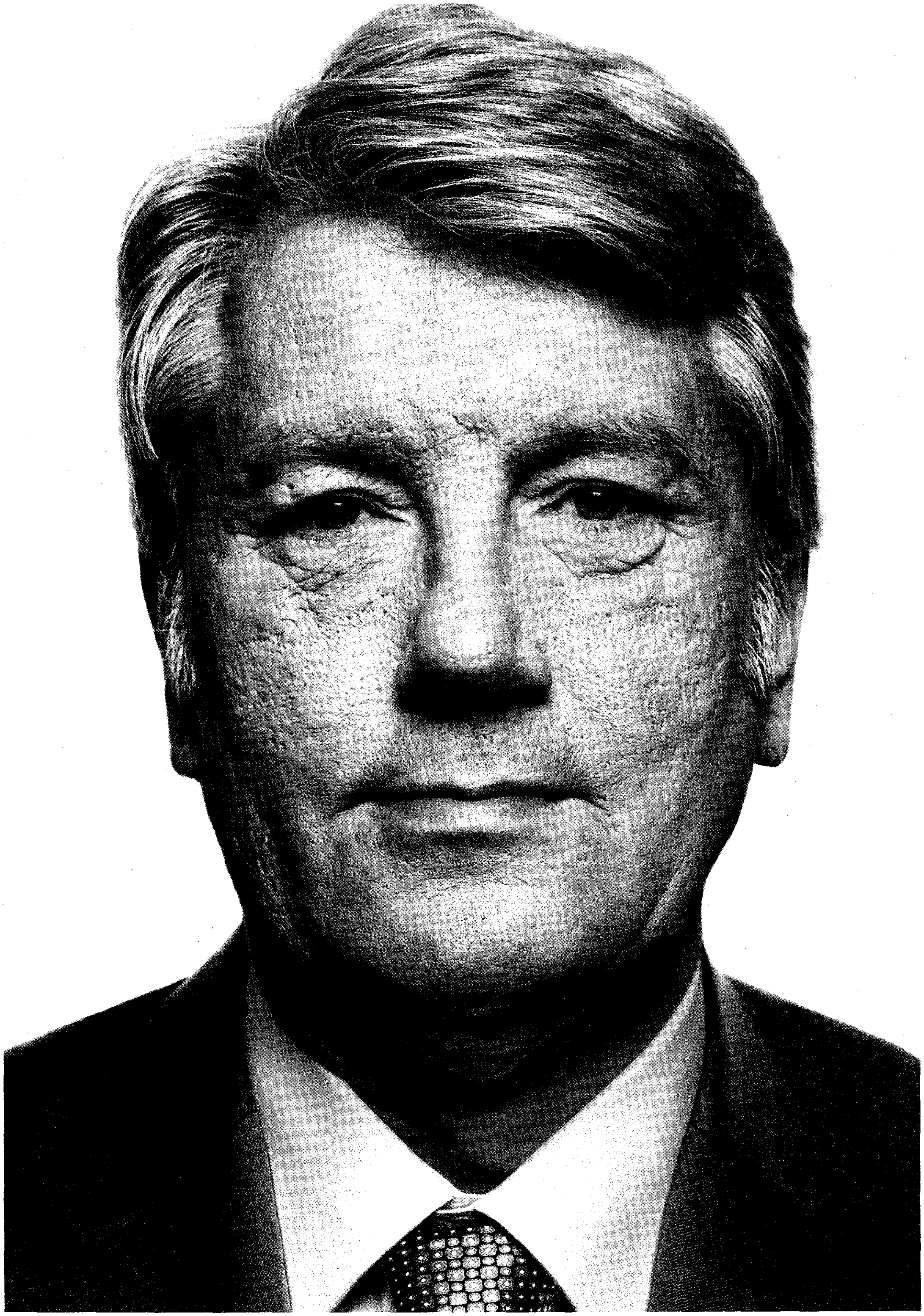
Anote Tong, the President of Kiribati. Tong was born on June 11, 1952, and became President in 2003.



Yukio Hatoyama, the Prime Minister of Japan. He was born on February 11,



Dmitry Medvedev, the President of Russia. Medvedev was born on September 14, 1965, and sworn in on May 7, 2008.



Victor Yushchenko, the President of Ukraine. Born on February 23, 1954, he assumed office on January 23, 2005.

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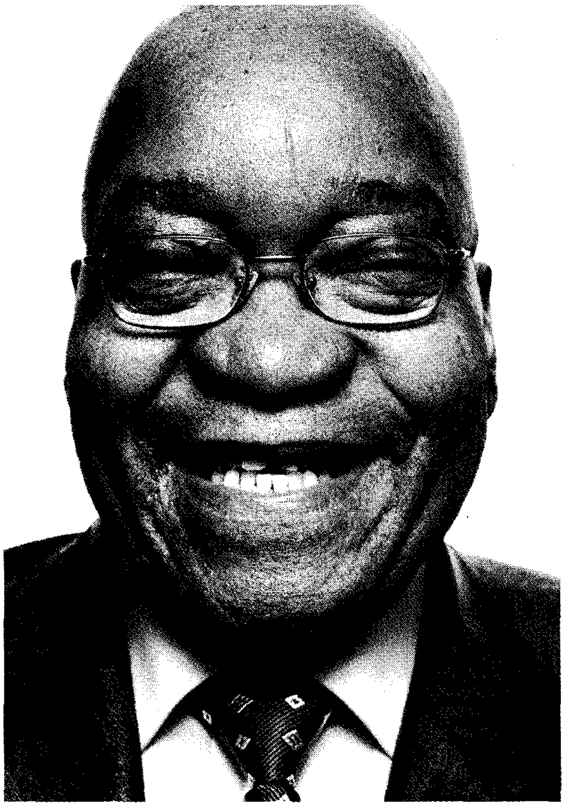
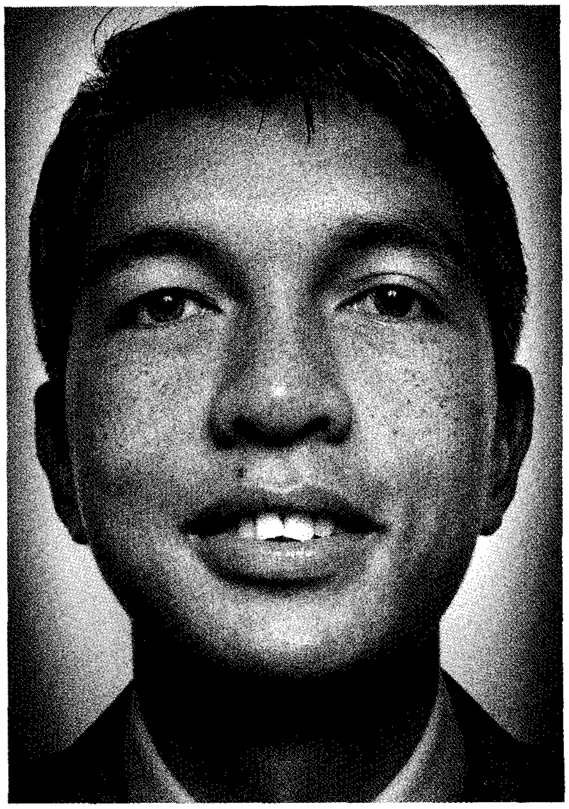
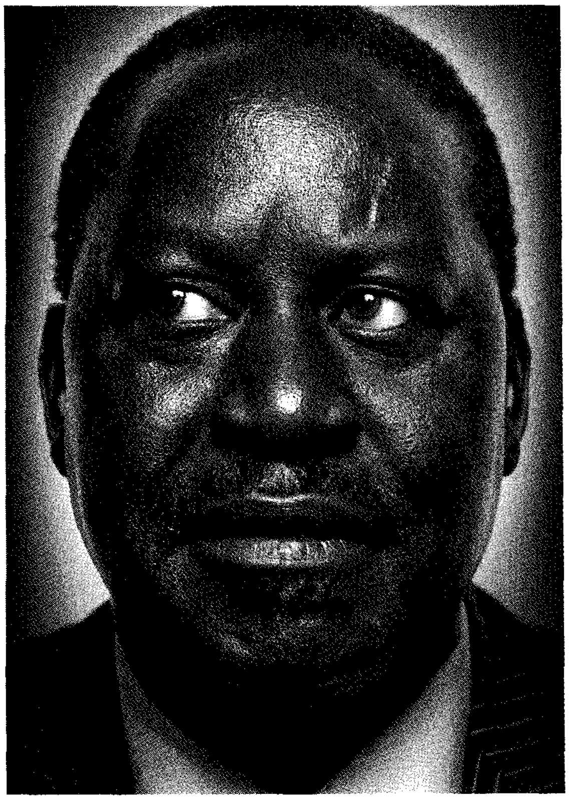


Jacob Zuma, the President of South Africa. Born on April 12, 1942, he became President on May 9, 2009.

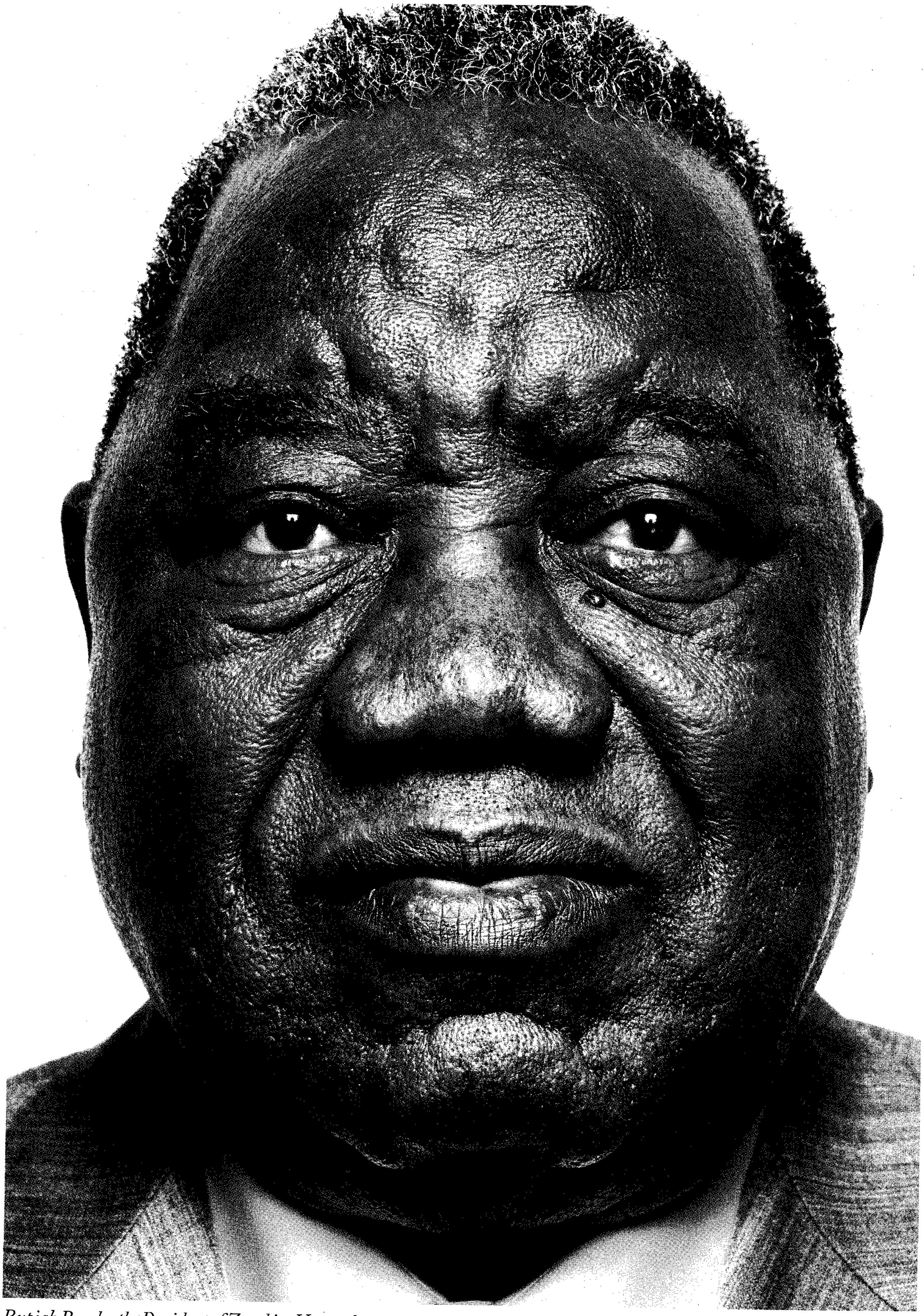


Andry Rajoelina, the President of the Transition, in Madagascar. Born in 1974, he took office in 2009.



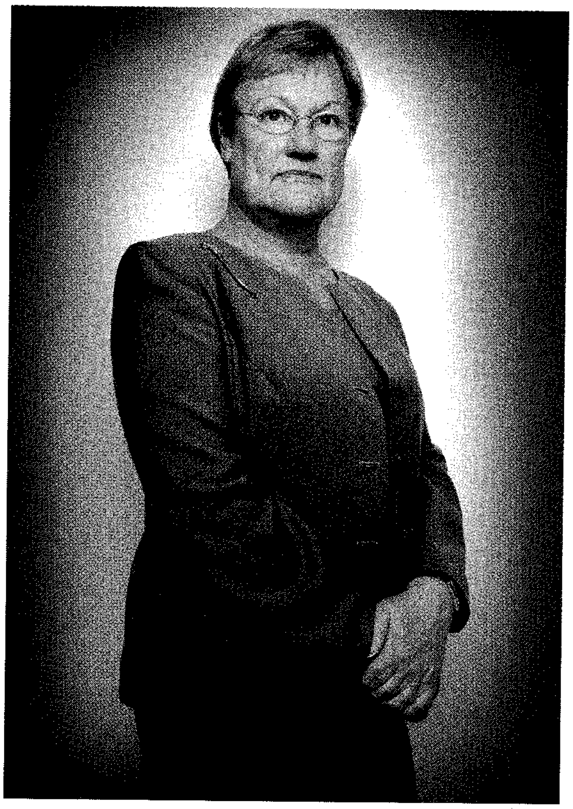
Raila Odinga, the Prime Minister of Kenya. He was born on January 7, 1945, and assumed office in 2008.

Faustin-Archange Touadéra, Prime Minister of Central African Republic. Born in 1957, he took office in 2008.



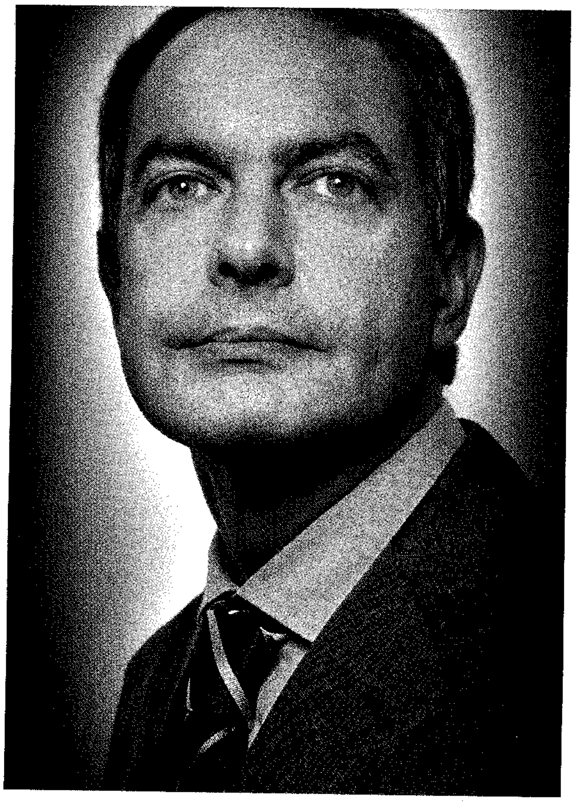
Rupiah Banda, the President of Zambia. He was born on February 19, 1937, and was sworn in on November 2, 2008.

Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda. Kagame was born on October 23, 1957, and assumed office on September 12, 2003.



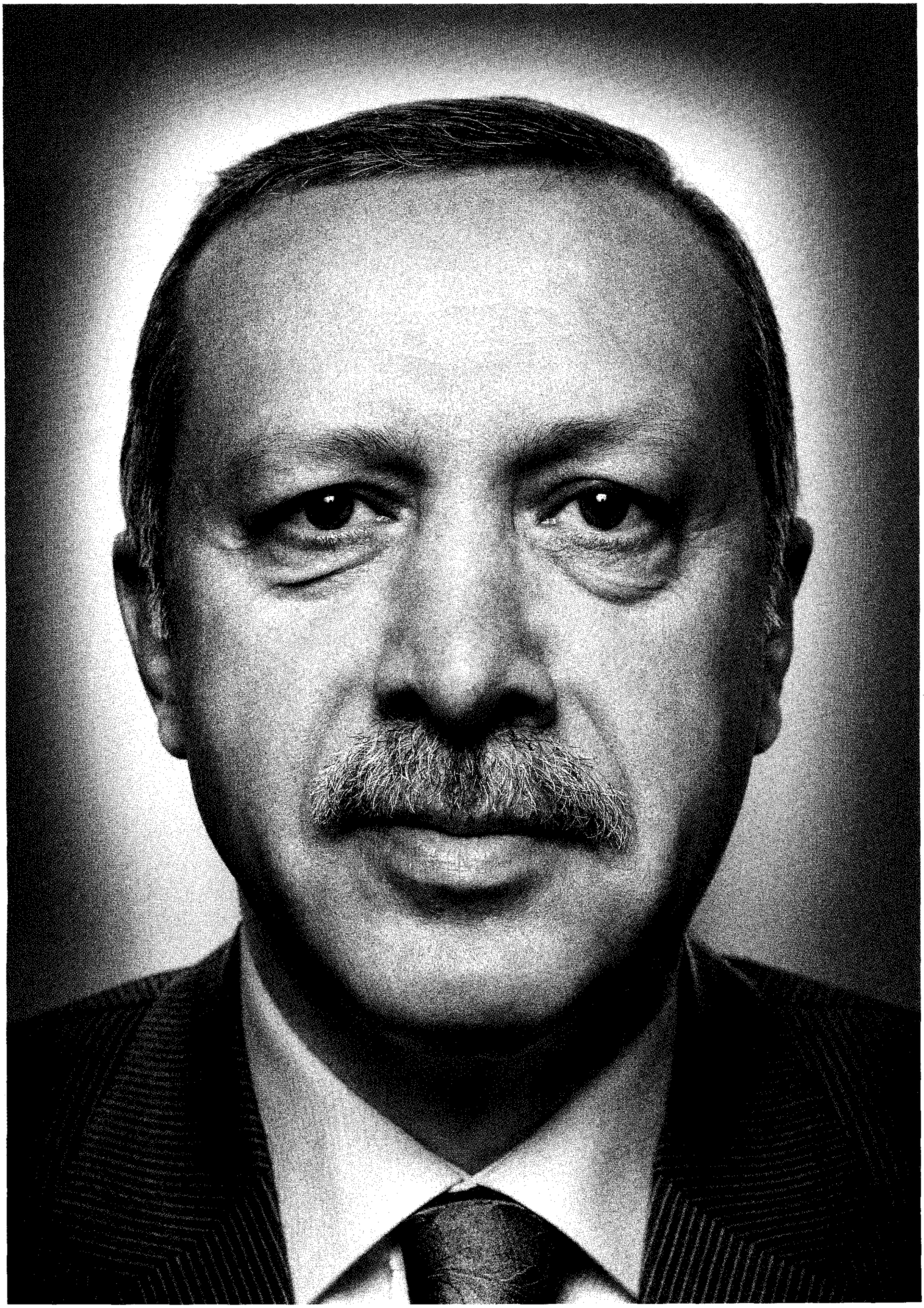
Tarja Halonen, the President of Finland, was born on December 24, 1943, and took office on March 1, 2000.

Lech Kaczyński, the President of Poland. He was born on June 18, 1949, and took office in December, 2005.

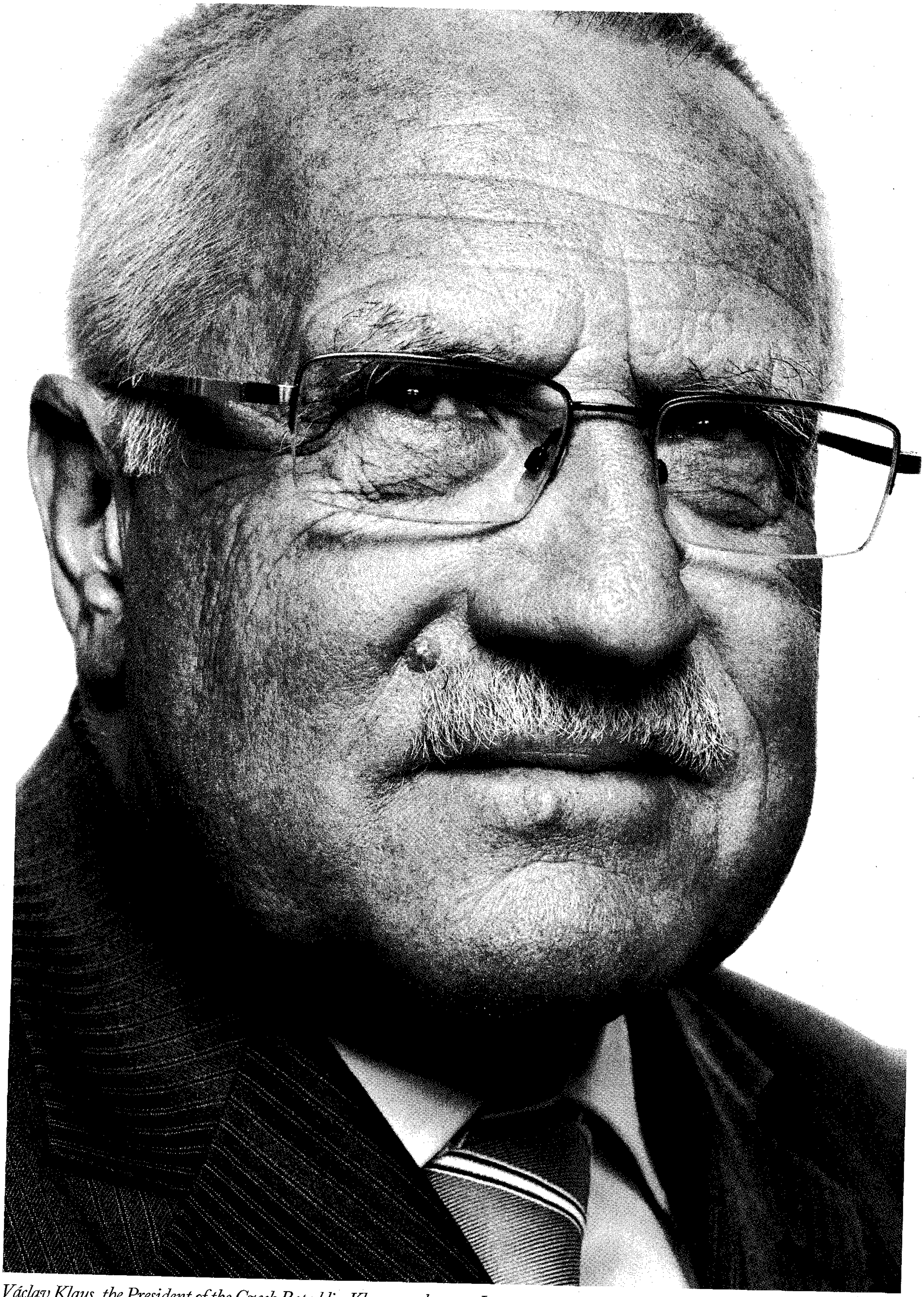


José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Prime Minister of Spain, was born on August 4, 1960, and took office in 2004.

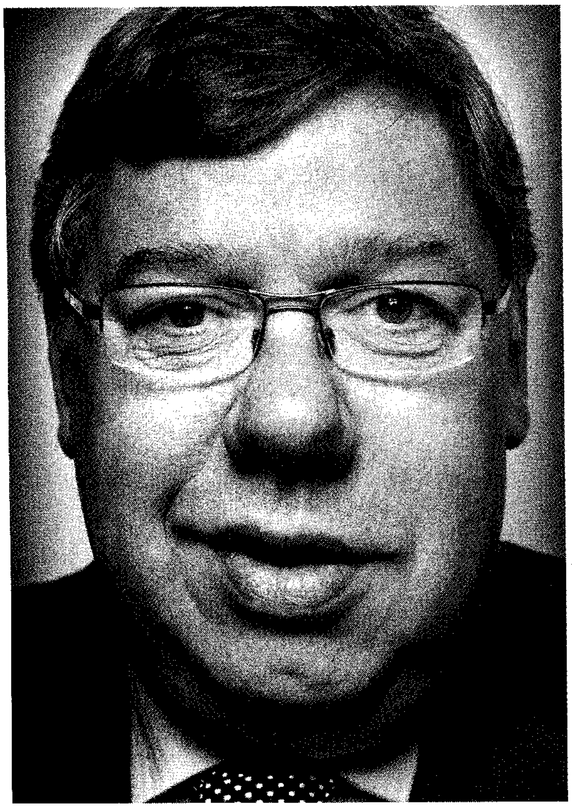
Heinz Fischer, the President of Austria, was born on October 9, 1938, and was sworn in on July 8, 2004.



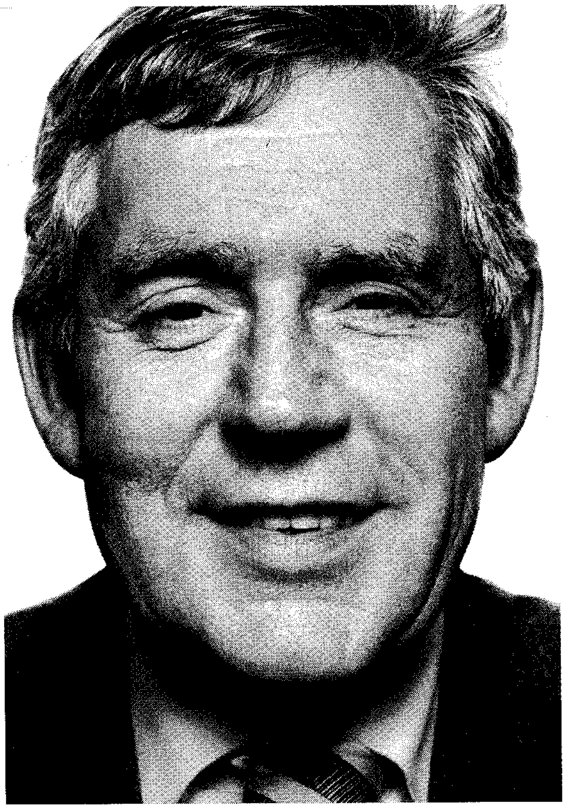
Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Prime Minister of Turkey. He was born on February 26, 1954, and took office on March 14, 2003.



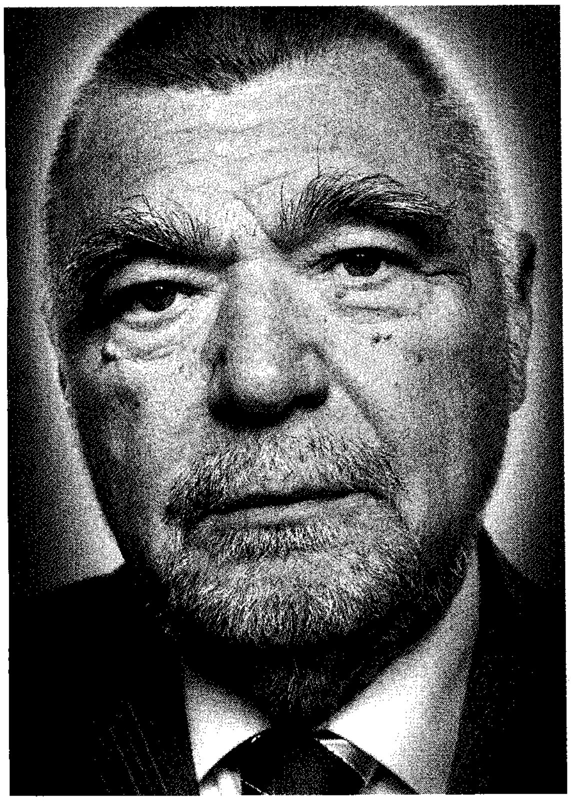
Václav Klaus, the President of the Czech Republic. Klaus was born on June 19, 1941, and sworn in on March 7, 2003.



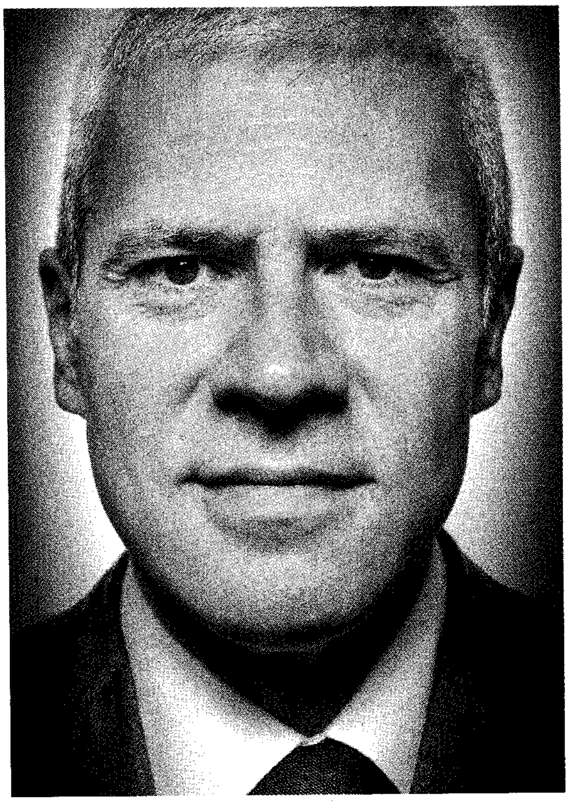
Brian Cowen, the Prime Minister of Ireland. Born on January 10, 1960, he was sworn in on May 7, 2008.



Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, was born on February 20, 1951, and took office in 2007.



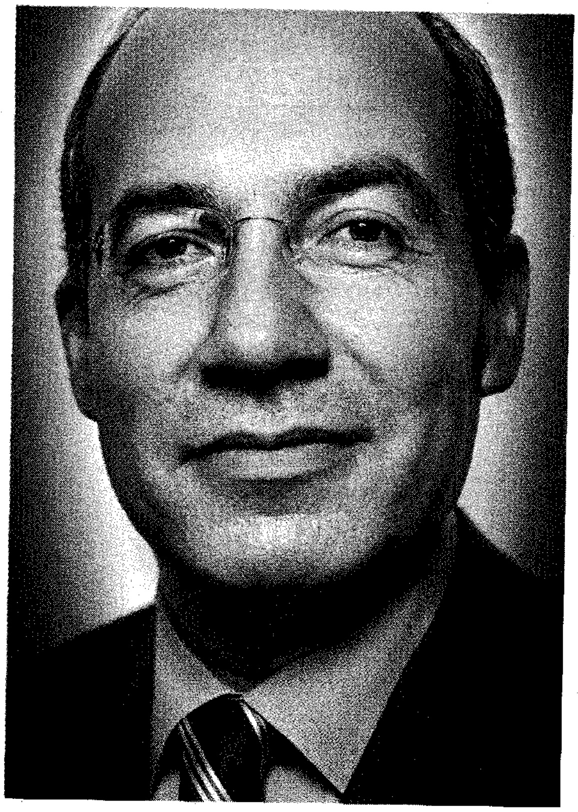
Stjepan Mesić, the President of Croatia, was born on December 24, 1934, and took office in 2000.



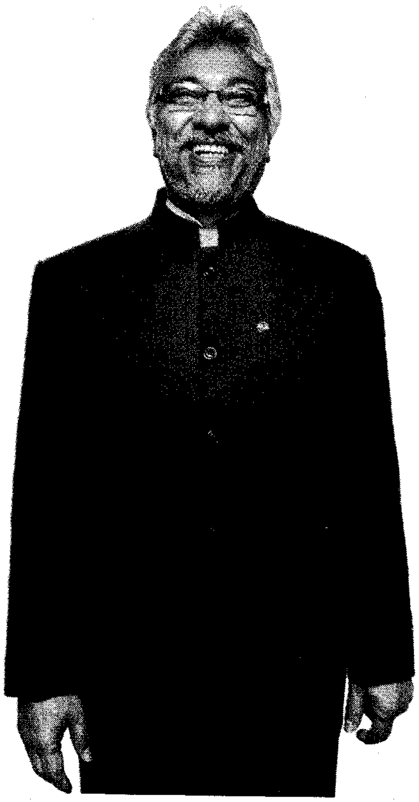
Boris Tadić, the President of Serbia. He was born on January 15, 1958, and became President in 2004.

Silvio Berlusconi, the Prime Minister of Italy. He was born on September 29, 1936, and took office, most recently, on May 8, 2008.

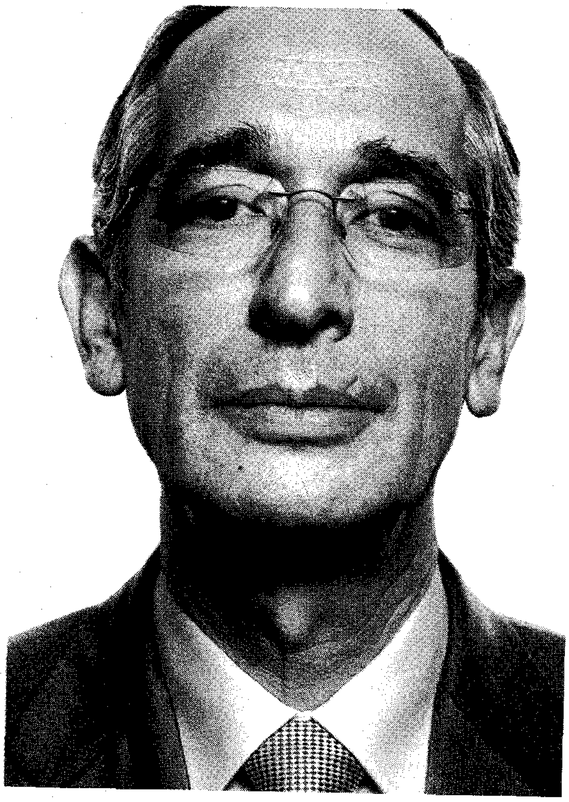
Cristina Fernández, the President of Argentina. Born on February 19, 1953, she was sworn in on December 10, 2007.



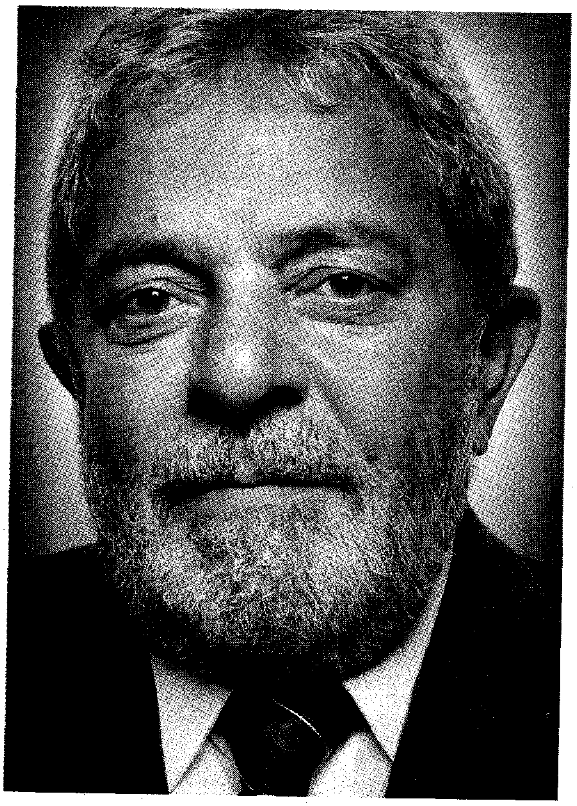
Felipe Calderón, the President of Mexico. He was born on August 18, 1962, and assumed office in 2006.



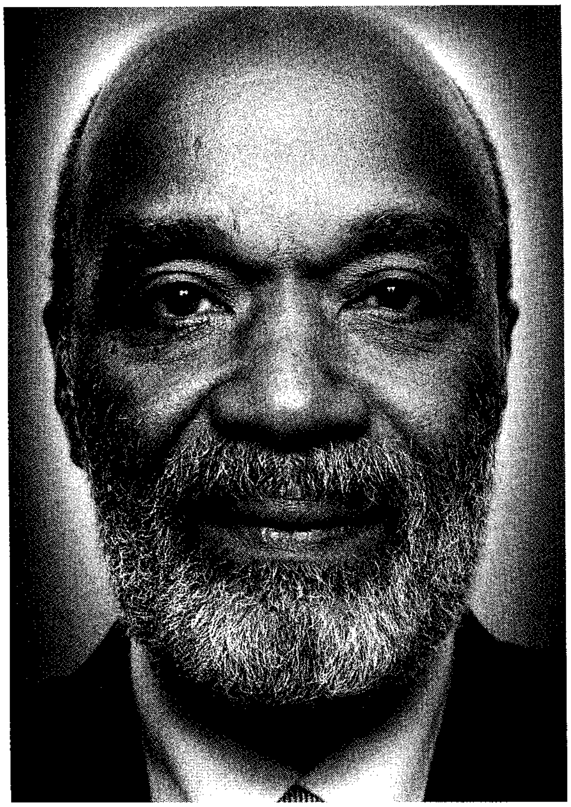
Fernando Lugo, the President of Paraguay. Born on May 30, 1951, he took office in August, 2008.



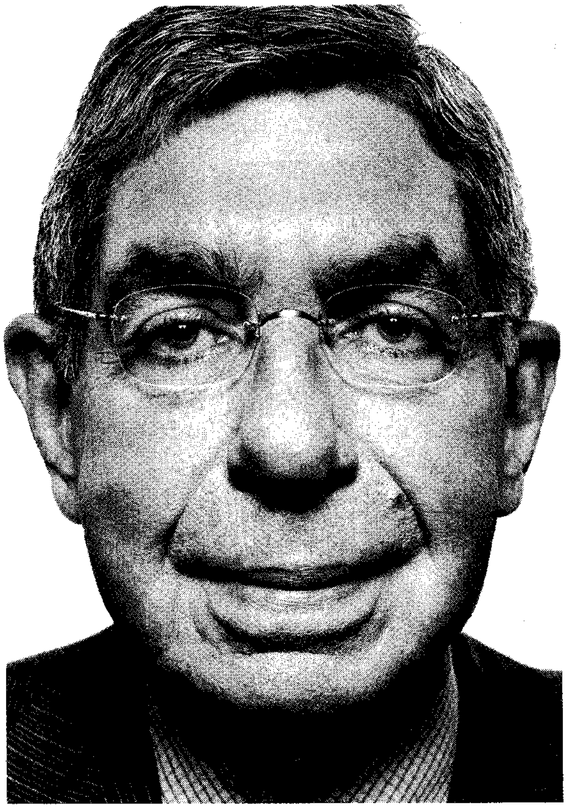
Álvaro Colom, the President of Guatemala. He was born on June 15, 1951, and assumed office in 2008.



Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the President of Brazil, was born on October 27, 1945. He took office in 2003.

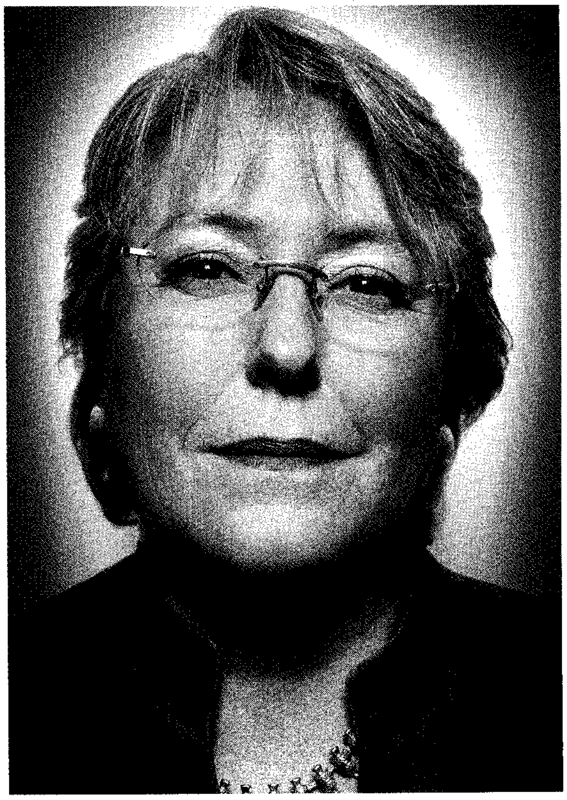


René Préval, the President of Haiti. Préval was born on Janaury 17, 1943, and assumed office in May, 2006.

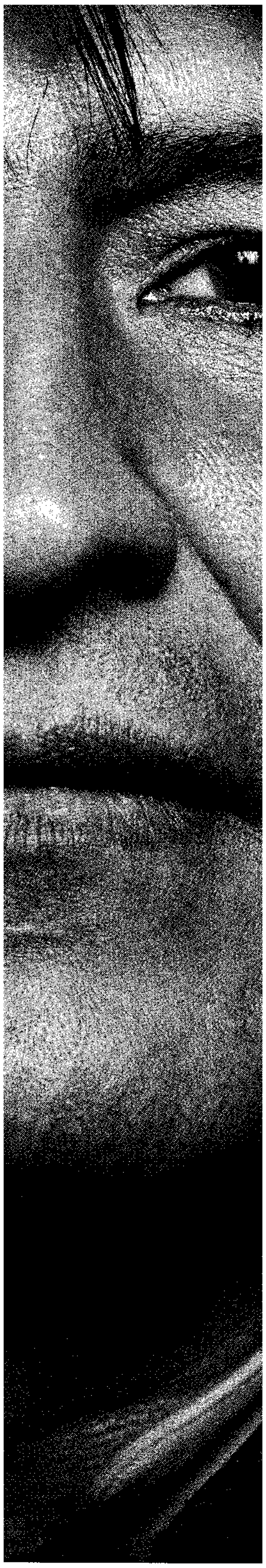


Óscar Arias, the President of Costa Rica. Born on September 13, 1940, he took office in May, 2006.

Álvaro Uribe, the President of Colombia. Uribe was born on July 4, 1952, and sworn in on August 7, 2002.



Michelle Bachelet, the President of Chile. She was born on September 29, 1951, and took office in 2006.



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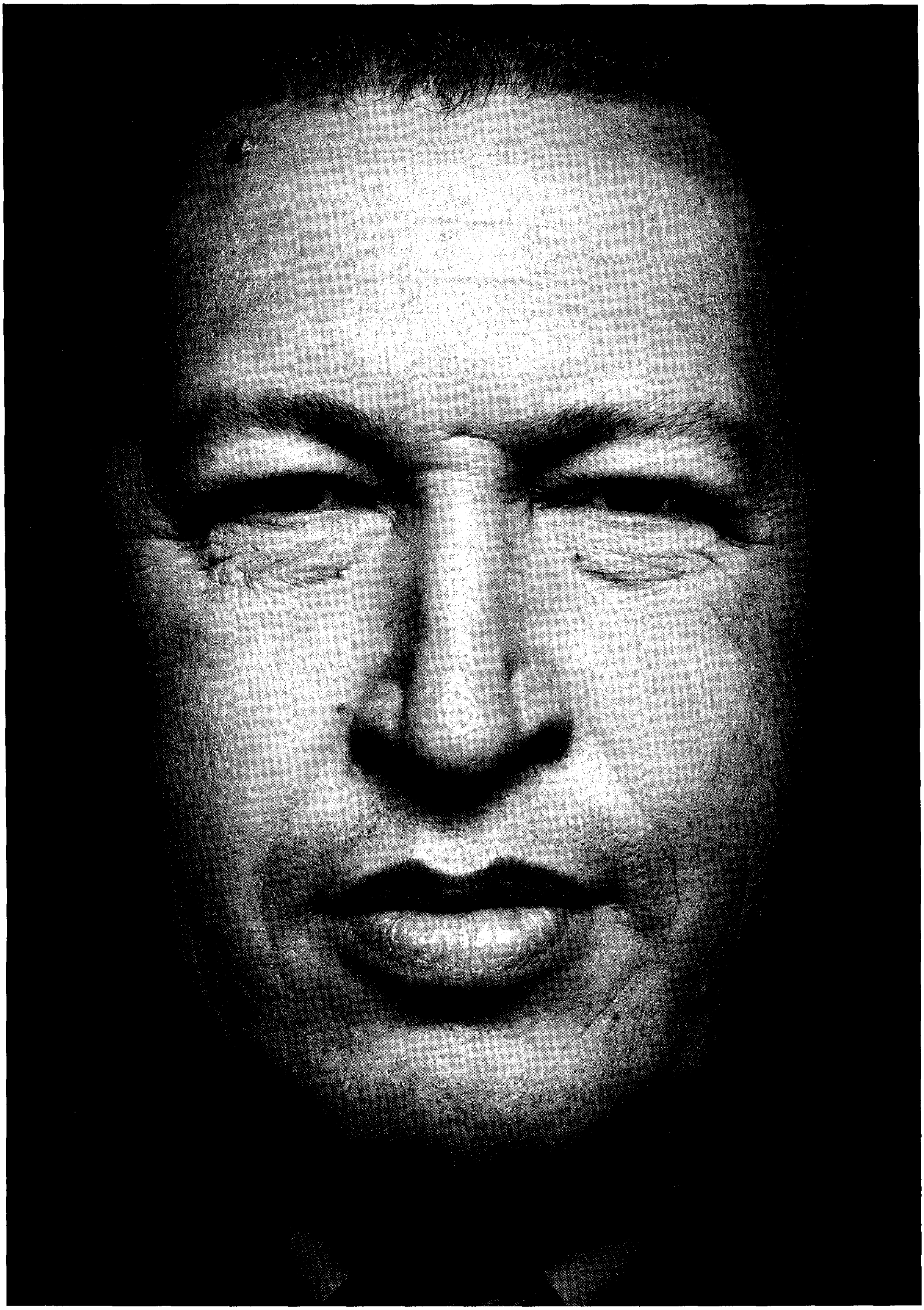


Hugo Chávez, the President of Venezuela. Born on July 28, 1954, he first assumed office on February 2, 1999.

FICTION

THE USE OF POETRY

BY IAN McEWAN

It surprised no one to learn that Michael Beard had been an only child, and he would have been the first to concede that he'd never quite got the hang of brotherly feeling. His mother, Angela, was an angular beauty who doted on him, and the medium of her love was food. She bottle-fed him with passion, surplus to demand. Some four decades before he won the Nobel Prize in Physics, he came top in the Cold Norton and District Baby Competition, birth-to-six-months class. In those harsh postwar years, ideals of infant beauty resided chiefly in fat, in Churchillian multiple chins, in dreams of an end to rationing and of the reign of plenty to come. Babies were exhibited and judged like prize marrows, and, in 1947, the five-month-old Michael, bloated and jolly, swept all before him. However, it was unusual at a village fête for a middle-class woman, a stockbroker's wife, to abandon the cake-and-chutney stall and enter her child for such a gaudy event. She must have known that he was bound to win, just as she later claimed always to have known that he would get a scholarship to Oxford. Once he was on solids, and for the rest of her life, she cooked for him with the same commitment with which she had held the bottle, sending herself in the mid-sixties, despite her illness, on a Cordon Bleu cookery course so that she could try new meals during his occasional visits home. Her husband, Henry, was a meat-and-two-veg man, who despised garlic and the smell of olive oil. Early in the marriage, for reasons that remained private, Angela withdrew her love from him. She lived for her son, and her legacy was clear: a fat man who restlessly craved the attentions of beautiful women who could cook.

Henry Beard was a lean sort with a drooping mustache and slicked-back brown hair, whose dark suits and brown tweeds seemed a cut too large, especially around the neck. He provided for his miniature family well and, in the fashion of the time, loved his son sternly and with little physical contact. Though he never embraced Michael, and rarely laid an affectionate hand on his shoulder, he supplied all the right kinds of present—Meccano and chemistry sets, a build-it-yourself wireless, encyclopedias, model airplanes, and books about military history, geology, and the lives of great men. He had had a long war, serving as a junior officer in the infantry in Dunkirk, North Africa, and Sicily, and then, as a lieutenant colonel, in the D Day landings, where he won a medal. He had arrived at the concentration camp of Belsen a week after it was liberated, and was stationed in Berlin for eight months after the war ended. Like many men of his generation, he did not speak about his experiences and he relished the ordinariness of postwar life, its tranquil routines, its tidiness and rising material well-being, and, above all, its lack of danger—everything that would later appear stifling to those born in the first years of the peace.

In 1952, when Michael was five, the forty-year-old Henry Beard gave up his job at a merchant bank in the City and returned to his first love, which was the law. He became a partner in an old firm in nearby Chelmsford and stayed there for the rest of his working life. To celebrate the momentous change and his liberation from the daily commute to Liverpool Street, he bought himself a secondhand Rolls-Royce Silver Cloud. This pale-blue machine lasted him thirty-three years, until his death. From the vantage of adulthood, and with some retrospective guilt, his son loved him for this grand gesture. But the life of a small-town solicitor, absorbed by matters of conveyancing and probate, settled on Henry Beard an even greater tranquillity. At weekends, he mostly cared for his roses, or his car, or golf with fellow-Rotarians. He stolidly accepted his loveless marriage as the price he must pay for his gains.

It was about this time that Angela Beard began a series of affairs that stretched over eleven years. Young Michael registered no outward hostilities or silent tensions in the home, but, then, he was neither observant nor sensitive, and was often in his room after school, building, reading, gluing, and later took up pornography and masturbation full time, and then girls. Nor, at the age of seventeen, did he notice that his mother had retreated, exhausted, to the sanctuary of her marriage. He heard of her adventures only when she was dying of breast cancer, in her early fifties. She seemed to want his forgiveness for ruining his childhood. By then he was nearing the end of his second year at Oxford and his head was full of maths and girlfriends, physics and drinking, and at first he could not take in what she was telling him. She lay propped up on pillows in her private room on the nineteenth floor of a tower-block hospital, with views toward the industrialized salt marshes by Canvey Island and the south shore of the Thames. He was grownup enough to know that it would have insulted her to say that he had noticed nothing. Or that she was apologizing to the wrong person. Or that he could not imagine anyone over thirty having sex. He held her hand and squeezed it to signal his warm feelings, and said that there was nothing to forgive.

It was only after he had driven home, and drunk three nightcap Scotches with his father, then gone to his old room and lain on the bed fully dressed and considered what she had told him, that he grasped the extent of her achievement. Seventeen lovers in eleven years. Lieutenant Colonel Beard had had all the excitement and danger he could stand by the age of thirty-three. Angela had to have hers. Her lovers were her desert campaign against Rommel, her D Day, and her Berlin. Without them, she had told Michael from her hospital pillows, she would have hated herself and gone mad. But she hated herself anyway, for what she thought she had done to her only child. He went back to the hospital the next day and, while she sweatily clung to his hand, told her that his childhood had been the happiest and most secure imaginable, that he had never felt neglected or doubted her love or eaten so well, and that he was proud of what he called her appetite for life and hoped to emulate it. It was the first time that he had ever given a speech. These half and quarter truths were the best words he had ever spoken. Six weeks later, she was dead. Naturally, her love life was a closed subject between father and son, but for years afterward Michael could not drive through Chelmsford or the surrounding villages without wondering whether this or that

IAN TYAS/KEYSTONE/GETTY

old fellow tottering along the pavement or slumped near a bus stop was one of the seventeen.

By the standards of the day, he was a precocious lad when he arrived at Oxford. He had already made love to two girls, he owned a car, a split-screen Morris Minor, which he kept in a lockup garage off the Cowley Road, and he had an allowance from his father that was far in excess of what other grammar-school boys received. He was clever, sociable, opinionated, unimpressed by and even a little scornful of boys from famous schools. He was one of those types, infuriating and indispensable, who were at the front of every queue, had tickets to key events in London, within days knew strategically important people and all kinds of shortcuts, social as well as topographic. He looked much older than eighteen, and was hardworking, organized, tidy, and actually owned and used a desk diary. People sought him out because he could repair radios and record-players and kept a soldering iron in his room. For these services he never asked for money, of course, but he had the knack of calling in favors.

Within weeks of settling in, he had a girlfriend, a "bad" girl from Oxford High named Susan Doty. Other boys studying maths and physics tended to be closed, mousy types. Outside of lab work and tutorials, Beard kept well clear of them, and he also avoided the arty sort of people—they intimidated him with literary references he did not understand. He preferred instead the engineers, who gave him access to their workshops, and the geographers, zoologists, and anthropologists, especially the ones who had already done field work in strange places. Beard knew many people but had no close friends. He was never exactly popular, but he was well known, talked about, useful to people, and faintly despised.

At the end of his second year, while he was trying to accustom himself to the idea that his mother would soon die, Beard overheard someone in a pub refer to a student at Lady Margaret Hall named Maisie Farmer as a "dirty girl." The phrase was used approvingly, as though it were a well-established category of some clinical accuracy. Her bucolic name in this connection intrigued him. He thought of a generous strapping lass, manure-streaked, astride a tractor—and then did not think about her again. The term ended, he went home, his mother died, and the summer was lost to grief and boredom and numbing, inarticulate silences at home with his father. They had never discussed feelings before, and had no language for them now. Once, when he saw from the house his father at the bottom of the garden, examining the roses too closely, he was embarrassed, no, horrified, to realize from the tremors of his father's shoulders that he was weeping. It did not occur to Michael to go out to him. Knowing about his mother's lovers, and not knowing whether his father knew—he guessed he did not—was another impossible obstacle.

He returned to Oxford in September and took a third-floor room in Park Town, a down-at-heel mid-Victorian crescent arranged around a central garden. His walk to the physics buildings each day took him past the front gates of the "dirty girl" 's college, by the narrow passageway to University Parks. One morning, on impulse, he wandered in and established at the porter's lodge that a student by the name of Maisie Farmer indeed existed. He discovered later in the same week that she was in her third year, doing English, but he did not let that put him off. For a day or two he wondered about her, and then work and other matters took over and he forgot all about her again, and it was not until late October that a friend introduced him to her and another girl outside the Museum of Natural History.

She was not as he had imagined, and at first he was disappointed. She was small, almost frail, intensely pretty, with dark eyes and scant eyebrows and a musical voice with a surprising accent, a hint of Cockney, which was unusual in a woman at university in those days. When, in answer to her question, he told her what his subject was, her face went blank and soon she walked on with her friend. He bumped into her alone two days later and asked her to come for a drink and she said no, and said it immediately, before he had quite finished his sentence. It was a measure of Beard's self-confidence that he was surprised. But what did she see in front of her? A stout fellow with an accountant's look and an earnest manner, wearing a tie (in 1967!), with short hair, side-parted, and, the damning detail, a pen clipped into the breast pocket of his jacket. And he was studying science, a non-subject for fools. She said goodbye politely enough and went on her way, but Beard walked after her and asked if she was free the next day, or the day after that, or at the weekend. No, no, and no. Then he said brightly, "How about ever?," and she laughed pleasantly, genuinely amused by his persistence, and seemed on the point of changing her mind. But she said, "There's always never? Can you make never?," to which he replied, "I'm not free," and she laughed again and made a sweet little mock punch to his lapel with a child-size fist and walked off, leaving him with the impression that he still had a chance, that she had a sense of humor, that he might wear her down.

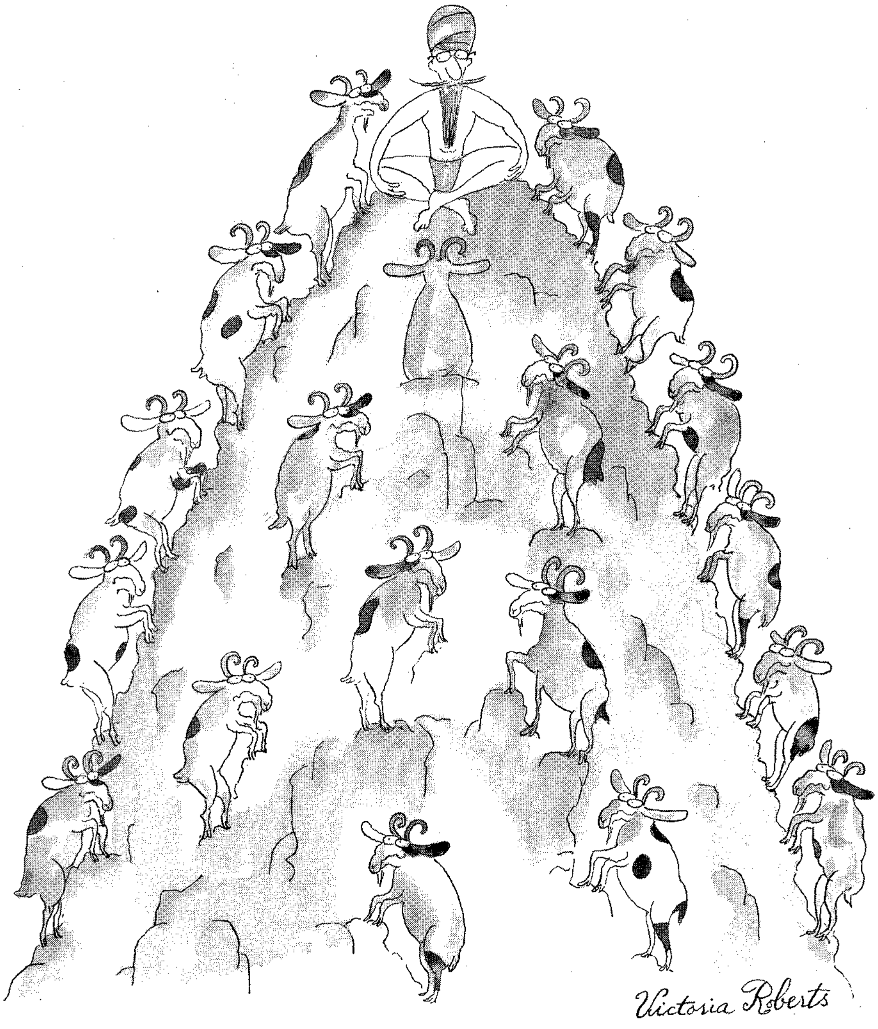
He did. He researched her. Someone told him that she had a special interest in John Milton. It did not take long to discover the century to which this man belonged. A third-year literature student in Beard's college who owed him a favor (for procuring tickets to a Cream concert) gave him an hour on Milton, what to read, what to think. He read "Comus" and was astounded by its silliness. He read through "Lycidas," "Samson Agonistes," and "Il Penseroso"—stilted and rather prissy in parts, he thought. He fared better with "Paradise Lost" and, like many before him, preferred Satan's party to God's. He, Beard, that is, memorized passages that appeared to him intelligent and especially sonorous. He read a biography, and four essays that he had been told were pivotal. The reading took him one long week. He came close to being thrown out of an antiquarian bookshop in the Turl when he casually asked for a first edition of "Paradise Lost." He tracked down a kindly tutor who knew about buying old books and confided to him that he wanted to impress a girl with a certain kind of present, and was directed to a bookshop in Covent Garden where he spent half a term's money on an eighteenth-century edition of "Areopagitica." When he speed-read it on the train back to Oxford, one of the pages cracked in two. He repaired it with Sellotape.

Then, naturally enough, he bumped into her again, this time by the gates of her college, where he had been waiting for two and a half hours. He asked if he could at least walk with her across the Parks.

She didn't say no. She was wearing an Army-surplus greatcoat, over a yellow cardigan, and a black pleated skirt and patent-leather shoes with strange silver buckles. She was even more beautiful than he had thought. As they went along he politely inquired about her work, and she explained, as though to a village idiot, that she was writing about Milton, a well-known English poet of the seventeenth century. He asked her to be more precise about her essay. She was. He ventured an informed opinion. Surprised, she spoke at greater length. To elucidate some point of hers, he quoted the lines "from morn / To noon he fell," and she breathily completed them: "from noon to dewy eve." Making sure to keep his tone tentative, he spoke of Milton's childhood, and then of the Civil War. There were things she did not know and was interested to learn. She knew little of the poet's life, and, amazingly, it seemed that it was not part of her studies, to consider the circumstances of his times. Beard steered her back onto familiar ground. They quoted more of their favorite lines. He asked her which Milton scholars she had read. He had read some of them, too, and gently proved it. He had glanced over a bibliography, and his conversation far outran his reading. She disliked "Comus" even more than he did, so he ventured a mild defense and allowed himself to be demolished.

Then he spoke of "Areopagitica" and its relevance to modern politics. At this she stopped on the path and asked significantly what a scientist was doing, knowing so much about Milton, and he thought he had been rumbled. He pretended to be just a little insulted. All knowledge interested him, he said; the demarcations between subjects were mere conveniences or historical accidents or the inertia of tradition. To illustrate his point, he drew on tidbits that he had picked up from his anthropologist and zoologist friends. With a first touch of warmth in her voice, she began to ask him questions about himself, though she did not care to hear about physics. And where was he from? Essex, he said. But so was she! From Chingford! That was his lucky break, and he seized his chance. He asked her to dinner. She said yes.

He was to count that misty, sunny November afternoon, along the Cherwell river by the Rainbow Bridge, as the point at which the first of his marriages began.



"You're not a goat person?"

• •

Three days later he took her to dinner at the Randolph Hotel, by which time he had completed another whole day of Milton. It was already clear that his own special study would be the physics of light, and he was naturally drawn to the poem of that name, and learned its last dozen lines by heart. Over the second bottle of wine, he talked to her of its pathos, a blind man lamenting what he would never see, then celebrating the redeeming power of the imagination. Over the starched tablecloth, wineglass in hand, he recited it to her, ending, "thou Celestial light / Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers / Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence / Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight." At these lines he saw the tears well in Maisie's eyes, and reached under his chair to produce his gift, "Areopagitica," bound in calf leather in 1738. She was stunned. A week later, illicitly in her room, to the sound of "Sgt. Pepper's" playing on the Dansette record-player he had repaired for her that afternoon with smoking soldering iron, they were lovers at last. The term "dirty girl," with its suggestion that she was general property, was now obnoxious to him. Still, she was far bolder and wilder, more experimental and generous in lovemaking, than any girl he had known. She also cooked a fine steak-and-kidney pie. He decided he was in love.

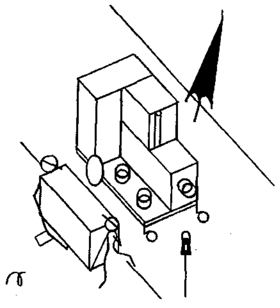
Going after Maisie was a relentless, highly organized pursuit, and it gave him great satisfaction, and it was a turning point in his development, for he knew that no third-year arts person, however bright, could have passed himself off, after a week's study, among the undergraduate mathematicians and physicists who were Beard's colleagues. The traffic was one way. His Milton week made him suspect a monstrous bluff. The reading was a slog, but he encountered nothing that could remotely be construed as an intellectual challenge, nothing on the scale of difficulty he encountered daily in his course. That very week of the Randolph dinner, he had studied the Ricci scalar and finally understood its use in general relativity. At least, he thought he could grasp these extraordinary equations. The theory was no longer an abstraction; it was sensual. He could *feel* the way the seamless fabric of space-time might be warped by matter, and how this fabric influenced the movement of objects, how gravity was conjured by its curvature. He could spend half an hour staring at the handful of terms and subscripts of the crux of the field equations and understand why Einstein himself had spoken of its "incomparable beauty," and why Max Born had said that it was "the greatest feat of human thinking about nature."

This understanding was the mental equivalent of lifting very heavy weights—not possible at first attempt. He and his lot were at lectures and lab work nine till five every day, attempting to grasp some of the hardest things ever thought. The arts people fell out of bed at midday for their two tutorials a week. He suspected that there was nothing they talked about at those meetings that anyone with half a brain could fail to understand. He had read four of the best essays on Milton. He *knew*. And yet they passed themselves off as his superiors, these lie-abeds, and he had let them intimidate him. No longer. From the moment he won Maisie, he was intellectually free.

Many years later, Beard told this story and his conclusions to an English professor in Hong Kong, who said, "But, Michael, you've missed the point. If you had seduced ninety girls with ninety poets, one a week in a course of three academic years, and remembered them all at the end—the poets, I mean—and synthesized your reading into some kind of aesthetic overview, then you would have earned yourself a degree in English literature. But don't pretend that it's easy."

But it seemed so at the time, and he was far happier during his final year, and so was Maisie. She persuaded him to grow his hair, to wear jeans instead of flannels, and to stop *repairing* things. It wasn't cool. And they became cool, even though they were both rather short. He gave up Park Town and found a tiny flat in Jericho, where they set up together. Her friends, all literature and history students, became his. They were wittier than his other friends, and lazier, of course, and had a developed sense of pleasure, as though they felt they were owed. He cultivated new opinions—on the distribution of wealth, Vietnam, the events in Paris, the coming revolution, and LSD, which he declared to be important, though he refused to take it. When he heard himself sounding off, he was not at all convinced, and was amazed that no one took him for a fraud. He tried pot and disliked it intensely for the way it interfered with his memory. Despite the usual parties, with howling music and terrible wine in sodden paper cups, he and Maisie never stopped working. Summer came, and finals, and then, to their stupid surprise, it was all over and everyone dispersed.

They both got firsts. Beard was offered the place he wanted at the University of Sussex, to do a Ph.D. They went to Brighton together and found a fine place to move into in September, an old rectory in an outlying village on the Sussex Downs. The rent was beyond them and so, before returning to Oxford, they agreed to share with a couple studying theology, who had newborn identical twins. The Chingford newspaper ran a story about the local working-class girl who had "soared to the heights," and it was from these heights, and to hold together their disintegrating milieu, that they decided to get married—not because it was the conventional thing to do but precisely because it was the opposite, it was exotic, it was hilarious and camp and harmlessly old-fashioned, like the tasselled military uniforms the Beatles wore in promotional pictures for their sensational LP. For that reason, the couple did not invite or even inform their parents. They were married in the Oxford registry office, and got drunk on Port Meadow with a handful of friends who came for the day. The new age dawned, the arrogant, shameless, spoiled generation turned its back on the fathers who had fought the war, dismissing them for their short hair and tidy ways and their indifference to rock and roll. Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Henry Beard D.S.O., living alone in the old house at Cold Norton, did not learn of his son's marriage until after the divorce.



The name of the married theology students was Gibson, Charlie and Amanda, and they were devout and intellectual, against the fashion of the time, and studied at an institute in Lewes. Their god, by way of mysterious love, or an urge to punish, had conferred on them two babies of a giant size and type who would easily have snatched the prize from Beard in '47, twins who never slept and rarely ceased their identical piercing wails, who set each other off if they ever failed to start up in step, and who jointly propelled a miasma through the elegant house, as penetrative as a curry on the stove, a prawn vindaloo, but rank like sea swamp, as though they were confined for reasons of religion to a diet of guano and mussels.

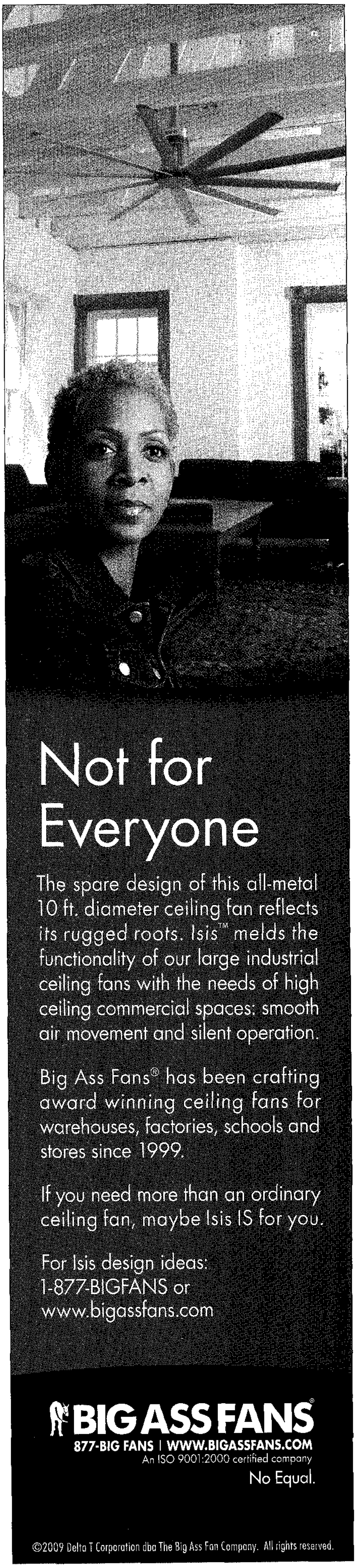
Young Beard, working in the bedroom on the early calculations that would lead him to his life's work—his life's free ride—stuffed wads of blotting paper in his ears and kept the windows open, even in midwinter. When he went downstairs to make himself coffee, he would encounter the couple in the kitchen, in some aspect of their private hell, dark-eyed and irritable from lack of sleep and mutual loathing, as they divvied up their awful tasks, which included prayer and meditation. The generous hallway and living spaces of the Georgian rectory were rendered charmless by the hundred protruding metal and plastic tools and devices of modern child care. Neither adult nor infant Gibsons expressed any pleasure in their own or one another's existence. Why would they? Beard privately swore to himself that he would never become a father.

And Maisie? She changed her mind about a doctorate on Aphra Behn; she turned down a job in the university library and signed on instead for social-security benefits. In another century she would have been considered a woman of leisure, but in the twentieth she was "active." She read up on social theory, attended a group run by a collective of Californian women, and started up a "workshop" herself, a new concept at the time, and though, in conventional terms, she no longer soared, her consciousness was raised, and within a short time she confronted the blatant fact of patriarchy and her husband's role in a network of oppression that extended from the institutions that sustained him as a man, even though he could not acknowledge the fact, to the nuances of his small talk.

It was, as she said at the time, like stepping through a mirror. Everything looked different, and it was no longer possible to be innocently content, not for her, and, therefore, not for him. Certain matters were settled after serious discussion. He was too much of a rationalist to think of many good reasons that he should not help out around the house. He believed that it bored him more than it did her, but he did not say so. And washing a few dishes was the least of it. There were profoundly entrenched attitudes that he needed to examine and change, there were unconscious assumptions of his own "centrality," his alienation from his own feelings, his failure to listen, to hear, really *hear* what she was saying, and to understand how the system that worked in his favor in both trivial and important ways always worked against her. One example was this: he could go to the village pub for a pleasant pint on his own, while she could not do so without being stared at by the locals and made to feel like a whore. There was his unexamined belief in the importance of his work, in his objectivity, and in rationality itself. He failed to grasp that knowing himself was a vital undertaking. There were other ways of knowing the world, women's ways, which he treated dismissively. Though he pretended not to be, he was squeamish about her menstrual blood, which was an insult to the core of her womanhood. Their lovemaking, blindly enacting postures of dominance and submission, was an imitation of rape and was fundamentally corrupt.

Months passed, and many evening sessions, during which Beard mostly listened and, in the pauses, thought about work. During that period, he was thinking a good deal about photons, from a radically different angle. Then, one night, he and Maisie were woken, by the twins as usual, and lay side by side on their backs in the dark while she broke the news that she was leaving him. She had thought this through and did not want an argument. There was a commune forming in the sodden hills of mid-Wales and she intended to join it and did not think she would ever return. She knew, in ways that he could never understand, that this must be her course now. There were issues of her self-realization, her past, and her identity as a woman that she felt bound to follow through. It was her duty. At this point, Beard felt himself overtaken by a powerful and unfamiliar emotion that tightened his throat and forced from his chest a sob that he was powerless to contain. It was a sound that surely all the Gibsons heard through the wall. It could easily have been confused with a shout. What he experienced was a compound of joy and relief, followed by a floating, expansive sensation of lightness, as if he were about to drift free of the sheets and bump against the ceiling. Suddenly, it was all before him, the prospect of freedom, of working whenever he wanted, of inviting home some of the women he had seen on the Falmer campus, lolling on the steps outside the library, of returning to his unexamined self and being guiltlessly shot of Maisie. All this caused a tear of gratitude to roll down his cheek. He also felt fierce impatience for her to be gone. It crossed his mind to offer to drive her to the station now, but there were no trains from Lewes at 3 A.M., and she had not packed. Hearing his sob, she reached for the bedside light and, leaning over to look into his face, saw the dampness around his eyes. Firmly and deliberately she whispered, "I will not be blackmailed, Michael. I will not, repeat *not*, be emotionally manipulated by you into staying."

Was ever a marriage dissolved so painlessly? Within a week she had left for the hill farm in Powys. In the course of a year they exchanged a couple of postcards. Then one came from an ashram in India, where she remained for three years and from where she sent one day her cheery acceptance of a divorce, all papers duly signed. He did not see her until his twenty-sixth birthday, at which she appeared with a shaved head and a jewel in her nose. Many years later, he spoke at her funeral. Perhaps it was the ease of their parting in the old rectory that made him so incautious about marrying again, and again. ♦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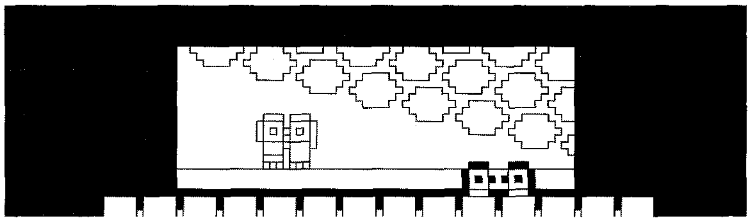


BOOKS

NORTH STAR

Populism, politics, and the power of Sarah Palin.

BY SAM TANENHAUS

The last time the publication of a political memoir aroused as much interest as Sarah Palin's "Going Rogue: An American Life" (Harper; $28.99) was probably in 1995, when Colin Powell's autobiography, "My American Journey," came out. Like Palin's bus tour through two dozen states (from Pennsylvania to New Mexico), Powell's twenty-three-city campaign began amid speculation, teasingly encouraged by Powell himself, that it might be a reconnaissance mission for a Presidential run, though of a more Olympian sort. "His book tour has the air of a political campaign," the *Times* reported. "Not the flesh-pressing campaign of a hungry primary candidate, but rather the roped-off, walkie-talkie-directed campaign of a sitting President." Trailed by a security detail, Powell gave a cursory news conference at each stop, fending off the more penetrating questions and aiming barbs at the crowded field of Republican hopefuls—who included Bob Dole, Phil Gramm, Lamar Alexander, and Pete Wilson. Not one fired back. "He's probably the most popular person in America right now," one of Gramm's advisers explained. "Everybody admires him." When, at last, Powell declared that he would not seek the nomination, many were relieved (including Powell's wife, Alma, who had feared an assassination attempt).

Powell's stately procession appears, in retrospect, to have been the last gasp of a bygone politics. He was perhaps the one remaining figure in American politics who could plausibly present himself as a hero in the classic sense—honored not only for his military record but also for his aura of remoteness. Yet the media looked very different then, too. In 1995, cable news remained the bland civic pasture of CNN and C-SPAN; Fox News and MSNBC were not founded until the following year. Rush Limbaugh was a bumptious presence—an honorary member of the Republican caucus that he had helped exhort to victory in the 1994 elections. But other noisemakers had yet to catch up. Bill O'Reilly was between jobs, having left the tabloid-gossip program "Inside Edition." Lou Dobbs was still a business specialist, and not the ringmaster of anti-immigration furor and the "birther" controversy. And no one had ever viewed a YouTube clip.

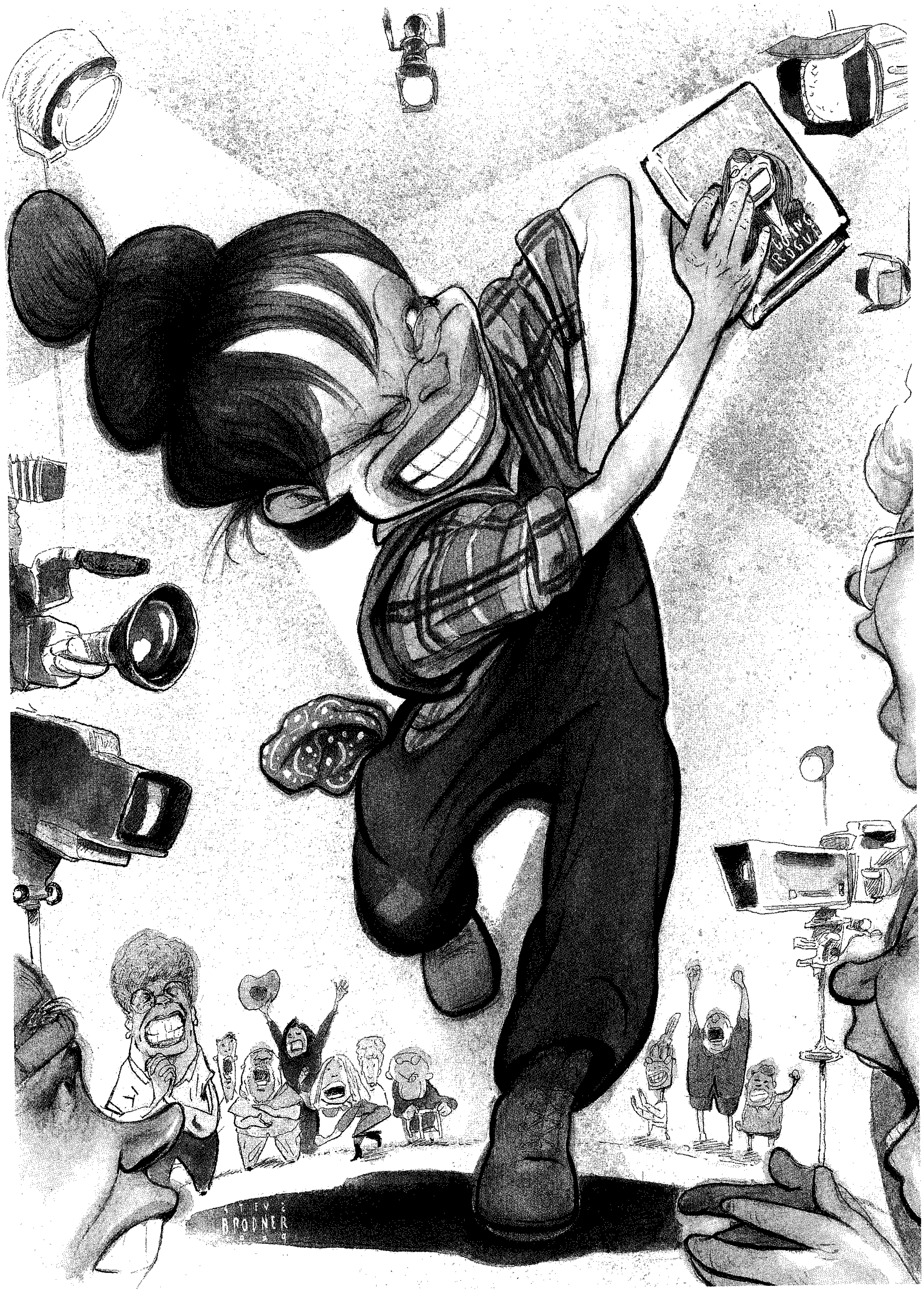
The worlds of media and politics have been steadily merging, and today they seem all but interchangeable. When Anita Dunn, until recently the White House communications director, labelled Fox News "the research arm or the communications arm of the Republican Party," she got the power dynamic backward. As the Republican Party, leaderless and rudderless, struggles to build a new identity based on more than lockstep obstructionism, people like Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity have claimed the role of ideological enforcers, turning up the heat on some suspected moderates, such as Governor Charlie Crist, of Florida, and extracting pledges from others.

Internal convulsion is an essential rite of the modern Republican Party, dating back to 1964, when grassroots activists, rallying behind the Presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater, routed the Party's East Coast leadership and realigned the Party along the Sun Belt axis. It happened again in 1976, when Ronald Reagan battled the incumbent Gerald Ford all the way to the National Convention; and in 1992, when Pat Buchanan harried George H. W. Bush during the primaries and then, in a televised address at the Convention, in Houston, thundered, "There is a religious war going on in this country." A similar revolt is under way today, though as yet no insurgent tribune has emerged—except, possibly, Sarah Palin. Polls taken last November showed that she had alienated centrists, and a majority of people still eye her with mistrust. But this is beside the point. Populists, from William Jennings Bryan and Huey Long through Joseph McCarthy and George Wallace, have always been divisive and polarizing. Their job is not to win national elections but to carry the torch and inspire the faithful, and this Palin seems poised to do. That she is the first woman to generate populist fervor on such a scale enhances her appeal—and makes her, potentially, a figure of historic consequence.

Palin has yet to declare her intentions, or even to say whether she envisions a future in elective politics. But this, too, only heightens the drama, as she flexes her iron grip on the daily news cycle, down to its hourly epicycles. (At one point, four stories about her appeared simultaneously on *Politico*, the insiders' daybook of Beltway chatter.) Palin's national career, which began in August, 2008, with her surprise selection as John McCain's running mate, has a permanent air of improvisation and experiment—for instance, the notorious "death panel" comment that threw the entire health-care debate into turmoil last summer, after she posted it online. (Her Facebook fan page now claims a million-plus "supporters.")

She has plunged with equal fervor into tabloid-ready conflict, trading in-

ABOVE: TIBOR KÁRPÁTI; OPPOSITE: STEVE BRODNER


GOING ROGUE
STEVE BRODNER 2009

Palin's supporters identify with her: she represents the erasure of any distinction between the governing and the governed.

sults with David Letterman and feuding with Levi Johnston, the father of her grandchild, who was preparing himself for a nude spread in *Playgirl* just as Palin was about to begin her book tour. Even before the book was published, its score-settling account of the disastrous 2008 campaign had elicited ferocious rebuttals from, among others, McCain's top strategist, Steve Schmidt, whom Palin accuses of having "put into motion a plan to destroy my reputation." (He replied that her account is "all fiction.") An ordinary politician would be reeling. But Palin understands more than anyone how interpenetrated the realms of politics and media have become. Her operating principle seems to be an observation made by Richard Hofstadter in 1954 that "the growth of the mass media of communication and their use in politics have brought politics closer to the people than ever before and have made politics a form of entertainment."

The message has not been lost on Palin's principal Republican rivals, the three other private citizens being mentioned as serious prospects for 2012: Newt Gingrich, Mike Huckabee, and Mitt Romney. Gingrich—the Republican Party's putative sage, who in August offered advice to Palin (first, write a book; second, get a regular TV gig)—is now in the midst of his own tour, in support of his book "To Try Men's Souls: A Novel of George Washington and the Fight for American Freedom," co-written with the military historian William R. Forstchen. (Sample lines: "One hell of a cause I belong to, he thought. Damn, why does it always seem to rain on armies in retreat?") As of late November, it was marooned at the bottom of the *Times'* extended best-seller list. Huckabee already has his own Fox talk show and a new book, "A Simple Christmas: Twelve Stories That Celebrate the Holiday Spirit." ("Joseph was Mary's boyfriend. There was nothing unusual about a teen-ager having a boyfriend, but Mary also had a secret: She had a baby inside her, and she wouldn't be able to hide it much longer.") By normal—that is, non-Palin—standards, it has sold extremely well, thanks both to the author's own book tour and to his Web site. Only Romney lags behind. His book, "No Apology," won't be out until March, though the stops on his tour were announced last week by his publisher.

All three are crowded near Palin in recent polls, but none have anything like Palin's star wattage. It is the one point on which admirers and detractors can agree. From the left: "Palin is a bona fide celebrity," note the editors of "Going Rouge," a new anthology of anti-Palin prose, most of it published during the campaign but repackaged to capitalize on the release of Palin's own book. "She transcends politics." From the right: "On the campaign trail she discovered a power greater than public office: the power of celebrity," writes Matthew Continetti, an editor at *The Weekly Standard* and the author of "The Persecution of Sarah Palin," a book that combines besotted advocacy with an assault on the liberal media that "tried to bring down a rising star."

"Greater than public office": this phrase distills an emerging doctrine on the right, as its long-standing distrust of federal bureaucrats and costly programs careers off into full-scale repudiation of governance itself. On this matter, too, Palin has outdone the field, with her surprise announcement, over the Fourth of July weekend, that she was quitting her job as governor of Alaska in order to pursue "positive change outside government." Some assumed that she had wilted under the mounting pressure of legal fees, the result of a barrage of ethics complaints, many of them filed by adversaries with long-simmering grievances. Others suspected that she was bored: after nine weeks of national electioneering—of TV cameras and photo shoots, of adoring crowds numbering in the tens of thousands—Juneau, Alaska, seemed a comedown, with its tiny government (forty members in the House of Representatives, twenty in the Senate), which convenes only ninety days a year. In her memoir, Palin adds another factor: noxious heckling from left-wing bloggers intent on proving that she is not the birth mother of her infant, Trig, who was born with Down syndrome. One way or another, it was all too much, and her only good option was to resign. "I knew we had just done the right thing for Alaska," she writes, in the first person plural that she favors

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when discussing her “team.” “We were now going to get to fight for what is right for our state and our country.”

The fascination with Palin owes something to the way that her cultish aura mirrors, or refracts, the aura that surrounds Barack Obama, the other political figure who comfortably inhabits the nexus of politics and celebrity. It has become fashionable to ridicule Palin as a tabloid creature, but it was not so long ago that Obama was being depicted as the chum of Britney Spears and Paris Hilton. Even now, the nimbus of celebrity clings to him, often with deflationary effect—for instance, during his recent visit to China, when at times he seemed less the leader of a major diplomatic mission than an attractive student ambassador, genially exporting good will and posing for photographs. When CNN intercut its evening coverage of Obama's trip with Palin's first bookstore appearance, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the two mise en scènes seemed eerily equivalent.

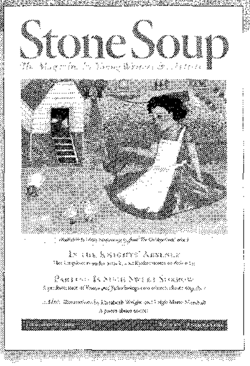
For the moment, Obama and Palin divide the electorate, and are bound by a strange symmetry: born in the nineteen-sixties, the only candidates from outside the Lower 48 ever to grace national tickets, and the beneficiaries of powerful social movements that they were too young to have participated in (civil rights in Obama's case, women's liberation in Palin's). Just as Obama, with his “post-racial” affect and his Ivy League pedigree, made an older African-American political figure like Jesse Jackson seem the relic of a vanished era, so Palin—with her lustrous mane and form-fitting skirts, her coddling of her infant son in the full glare of TV cameras—presented a new model of the spontaneous woman politician, free of the overmanaged self-discipline that constrains Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi.

What Palin doesn't have is a serious program. Her book offers only the conservative dogmas of the moment—the sins of big government, the glories of the free market, the greatness of America. This isn't altogether surprising. Obama—himself no stranger to the political uses of the book tour—was also accused of being stronger on rhetoric than on policy detail, not least by Hillary Clinton during the primaries. Almost a year into his Presidency, we now see his intentions more clearly. He means to usher in the third phase of liberal reform that began with the New Deal and continued with the New Frontier–Great Society initiatives. But these ambitions were given shape by the conditions he inherited upon taking office, and could be glimpsed only tenuously from his apprenticeship as a state legislator and then a U.S. senator.

Palin's career—a total of some seventeen years in Alaska politics—offers few definitive clues, either, though the record looks better than some may suppose. In “Sarah from Alaska” (PublicAffairs; $26.95), Scott Conroy and Shushannah Walshe, who covered Palin's Vice-Presidential campaign for CBS and Fox News, respectively, give a balanced and well-reported, if not especially searching, account of Palin's career. They praise her for building bipartisan coalitions and for being a genuine ethics reformer at a time when the state was being mismanaged by an entrenched club of men, many of them Republicans, including the longtime U.S. senator Ted Stevens. Appointed to the Alaska Oil and Gas Conservation Commission, a regulatory agency, she reported the infractions of Rudy Ruedrich, a colleague on the commission who was also the chairman of the state Republican Party, when she discovered that he was “conducting political business from his state computer and leaking confidential information to a company he had been tasked to regulate.” Palin's crusading played well with the Alaska press, and, as governor, she appointed seven reporters to her administration. Beyond this, the record is blurred. The natural-gas pipeline that she claimed as her signal accomplishment is “still theoretical,” Conroy and Walshe report, and “figures to be either her crowning achievement or her most embarrassing failure.” But there is no denying her popularity in the summer of 2008, when her eighty-per-cent approval ratings made her a tempting choice during John McCain's search for a running mate.

Her rise was helped along, naturally, by opportunism and persistent self-aggrandizement—familiar traits, but in Palin's case magnified, or melodrama-

“The New Yorker of the 8-13 set.” —Ms.



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tized, to an unusual degree. Whenever "Going Rogue," which Palin wrote with the help of the Christian journalist Lynn Vincent, leaves the subject of family joys ("Every child is created special, with awesome purpose and amazing potential"), the beauties of the Alaska landscape ("Autumn in Alaska shimmers in white and gold"), or the utility of prayer ("As the months went on, Todd's prayer was answered by an offer for a permanent position with BP") and turns to politics, it becomes a narrative of almost continual embattlement. It's the outsider against the insiders, the innocent circled by wolves, whether in the Alaska Republican Party, in the "professional political caste" that stifled and, finally, betrayed her during the 2008 campaign, or in "the liberal media." In almost every case, Palin's own part in these conflicts is scrubbed free of complicating detail, lest it add darkening shadows to her pastel self-depiction. Even her campaign for mayor of Wasilla, in 1996, is cast as a homely contest between her vision of smaller government against the incumbent Republican's preference "for more government control." In fact, Palin won by attacking her opponent over "values," in mimicry of the campaigns that social conservatives were leading in the Lower 48. Her "genius was to transform a sleepy municipal election into a philosophical grudge match," Matthew Continetti writes, one that was "fought over three issues—guns, spending, and abortion."

This aspect of the campaign is well known and, in any case, shouldn't hurt her with her base. Why airbrush it? Perhaps because Palin has taken the measure of her readers and their expectations. It is one thing to commit casual ideological libel against Obama, as Palin does when she intimates that his "past comments and associations with anti-capitalist radicals would influence his economic policy," thus implying that the true authors of the stimulus were Saul Alinsky and Bill Ayers, rather than the Wall Street-friendly economists Lawrence Summers and Timothy Geithner. But it is quite another thing to own up to an episode of election hardball in her home town—ruthlessness on a level more likely to affront the "ordinary" people on whom she holds a special claim, particularly those captivated by her image as salt-of-the-earth supermom.

YOUNG MAN PICKING FLOWERS

All at once he is no longer
young with his handful of flowers
in the bright morning their fragrance
rising from them as though they were
still on the stalk where they opened
only this morning to the light
in which somewhere unseen the thrush
goes on singing its perfect song
into the day of the flowers
and while he stands there holding them
the cool dew runs from them onto
his hand at this hour of their lives
is it the hand of the young man
who found them only this morning

—*W. S. Merwin*

She is equally circumspect on the issue of ethnicity, pointing out that Todd, whom she met in high school, is "part Yupik Eskimo" and opened her to the "social diversity" of Alaska. (Wasilla is more than eighty per cent white.) Palin, though notoriously ill-travelled outside the United States, did journey far to the first of the four colleges she attended, in Hawaii. She and a friend who went with her lasted only one semester. "Hawaii was a little too perfect," Palin writes. "Perpetual sunshine isn't necessarily conducive to serious academics for eighteen-year-old Alaska girls." Perhaps not. But Palin's father, Chuck Heath, gave a different account to Conroy and Walshe. According to him, the presence of so many Asians and Pacific Islanders made her uncomfortable: "They were a minority type thing and it wasn't glamorous, so she came home." In any case, Palin reports that she much preferred her last stop, the University of Idaho, "because it was much like Alaska yet still 'Outside.' "

Palin's discomfort is easy to understand. Race is often the subtext of populist campaigns; their most potent appeal is to whites who are feeling under siege by changing economic and cultural conditions. Palin's strength with this constituency can only have grown since the last election. It's the reason that her bus tour is passing through the small cities and towns (Fort Wayne, Indiana; Washington, Pennsylvania) where the 2008 election might have been won. Already, she has drawn thousands of fans, some pitching tents overnight in the hope of receiving an autographed book. She is avoiding major cities in the Northeast and on the West Coast, a pointed assertion of her contempt for metropolitan élites. When McCain asked if Palin's husband was prepared for the rigors of a national campaign, Palin assured him that he was, and also that they were the couple for the job: "We felt our very normalcy, our status as ordinary Americans, could be a much needed fresh breeze blowing into Washington, D.C."

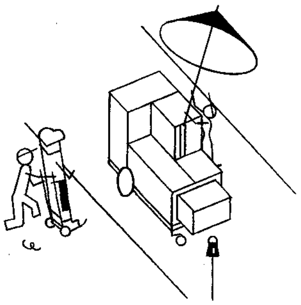
To an extent unmatched by any recent major political figure, she offers the erasure of any distinction—in skill, experience, intellect—between the governing and the governed. As one supporter told Conroy and Walshe, "If she can run a home, she can run the government." Palin agrees: "There's no better training ground for politics than motherhood." Describing the responsibilities of managing Alaska's budget, she makes the same argument in fancier language: "Lessons learned on the micro level still apply to the macro. Just as my family couldn't fund every item on our wish list, and had to live within our means as well as save for the future, I felt we needed to do that for the state." Her insistent ordinariness is an expression not of humility but of egotism, the certitude that simply being herself, in whatever unfinished condition, will always be good enough.

In her speech at the Republican Convention, Palin cited the example of Harry Truman, "a young farmer and haberdasher from Missouri" who "followed an unlikely path to the Vice-Presidency." But Truman's early years were spent in preparation for some future exemplary role, and for the historical destiny that he hoped, against all odds, he might someday fulfill. He regarded his ordinariness as something to be overcome, not celebrated. Though often derided in his day as a "little man," he closely studied the lives of the greats, with special emphasis on antiquity—Hannibal, Cincinnatus, Scipio, Cyrus the Great—and consciously patterned himself after them. "Reading history, to me, was far more than a romantic adventure," he said. "It was solid instruction and wise teaching which I somehow felt that I wanted and needed." As President, he formed a strong bond with his Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, a product of Yale and Harvard, and a bugbear of Joseph McCarthy and his congressional allies, whom Acheson described as "political primitives."

The appetite for betterment that drove Truman is strangely absent in Palin. Though she says that she was a voracious reader in childhood, she nowhere indicates what she learned about politics or governance from books, from the college courses she took, or even from more experienced officeholders in Alaska. She (or her collaborator) sprinkles nuggets from Plato and Pascal, but is more convincing when she cites a motivational maxim from "author and former football coach Lou Holtz." When the call came from John McCain to discuss her possible place on the ticket, Palin, in her favored idiom, didn't blink. It was confirmation of her self-assessment. "I certainly didn't think, *Well, of course this would happen*. But neither did I think, *What an astonishing idea*. It seemed more comfortable than that, like a natural progression." It may have seemed less natural to advisers who, prepping her for interviews and debates, were startled by the gaping holes in her knowledge. When Fred Barnes, the *Weekly Standard* editor and writer, asked Palin who her favorite thinker was, she replied, "You." Barnes has observed that Palin's "Republican heroes, besides McCain, come to a grand total of two, Reagan and Lincoln."

"Going Rogue" does indeed invoke Reagan, as so many conservative memoirs and manifestos do, although Palin's discussion of one of his cherished principles, "Get federal spending under control," omits the fact that Reagan himself violated it. (During his Presidency, federal spending exceeded all previous levels in the postwar era; not a single major program was eliminated.) Nonetheless, Reagan the candidate personified the ideal of the citizen politician, so important to the rise of modern conservatism, and Palin is right to draw on his example. What she ignores, though, is the fact that Reagan, like Truman, immersed himself in solitary preparation. A consultant to Reagan's first political campaign, in 1966, when he ran for governor of California, reported that "his library is stacked with books on political philosophy." The radio scripts that he wrote and read in the nineteen-seventies, at a rate of five a week, were models of concise argument, as were his letters to contemporaries like William F. Buckley, Jr. But then Reagan, again like Truman, aspired to the heroic ideal. Despite his Hollywood past—or perhaps to atone for it—he cultivated an air of almost imperial remoteness. "What stayed with me," Colin Powell writes in "My American Journey" of his first meeting with Reagan, "was the paradox of warmth and detachment Reagan seemed to generate simultaneously, as if there could be such a thing as impersonal intimacy."

This is just one of the many vivid impressions of the mighty recorded in Powell's book, the engrossing story of the path that led him from a South Bronx tenement to the inner sanctums of institutional power. Every page is informed by an acute sense of his multiple identities, which situated him at once within and apart from the worlds he inhabited. It's significant that he titled his memoir a "journey," while Palin has called hers a "life." She certainly accumulated mileage: the distance between Wasilla and Juneau is five hundred and sixty-five miles. But the sense of moral or intellectual progress is altogether absent. In this, Palin embodies the curiously arrested condition of the movement she evidently seeks to lead.



Conservatives, who used to denounce "identity politics," have fashioned their own version of it, anchored in the culture wars, with its parallel conflicts of background and class. Palin incarnates the latest version, which is a politics not of "special interests" but of the singular self. In "The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America" (1961), Daniel Boorstin distinguishes between heroes, whose higher example can "fill us with purpose, " and celebrities—each his own fleeting "human pseudo-event"—who "are nothing but ourselves seen in a magnifying mirror." But what about the ambitions or hopes of celebrities themselves? What is it that they really want? Sarah Palin's uncertain future raises this question.

To judge from her book, the most exciting time in her life was the election of 2008, when she was embraced by the army of "everyday, hardworking Americans," the "everyday folks," and "thousands of regular Americans coming out with their signs" who mobbed her tumultuous rallies, thrilling to her odes to the "true America." She gave them a "magnifying mirror." They reflected her own image back to her. This adoration is kept alive today by the excited autograph-seekers in Grand Rapids and Fort Wayne, in the audience that gave Oprah Winfrey her best ratings in two years, and in the various advocacy groups that have sprung up to promote Palin for the Presidency: Conservatives 4 Palin, Team Sarah, Vets 4 Sarah, 2012 Draft Sarah Committee, Sarah Palin Radio, SarahPAC. The true meaning of Palinism is Sarah Palin—nothing more and nothing less. She is a party unto herself. ♦

BOOKS

THE POWER AND THE GLORY

A newspaper legend recalls his ascent.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

Twenty-five years ago, Harold Evans published a memoir called "Good Times, Bad Times," which told about the fourteen years he spent as the editor of the London *Sunday Times*, and about losing his job after Rupert Murdoch bought the paper. In the memoir, he appeared as a fully formed editorial big shot, albeit one who was cruelly and unfairly knocked off his perch. In his new book, "My Paper Chase: True Stories of Vanished Times" (Little, Brown; $27.99), which is closer to a true autobiography, Evans explains how he got to be the person who fought with Murdoch in the first place.

The Murdoch press likes to characterize professionally esteemed editors like Evans as liberal élitists. That line doesn't work with Evans. He is a child of what he calls "the self-consciously respectable working class" in the urban North of England. Both of his parents, by his enthusiastically detailed account, worked like mad to make the most of themselves—his father as a train driver, his mother as the operator of a small grocery store that she created in the living room of their house, in Manchester. But their opportunities were strictly limited, because of the British class system—in particular, it was nearly impossible for working-class kids to get a real education.

Evans, born in 1928, came along just in time for the advent of the supposedly progressive system that led Michael Young, the mordant British sociologist, to coin the disapproving term "meritocracy." Evans took the eleven-plus exam and did not do well enough to place in the ten per cent of children who had good odds of going to university. Instead, he proceeded on pure drive. At sixteen, he finished school and wrote letters asking for work to every newspaper in or near Manchester (there were a lot of them). He wound up with a three-month tryout, at a pound a week, at the Ashton-under-Lyne *Reporter*, a relentlessly quotidian paper—"it bothered with the little things in people's lives, the whist drives and flower shows," Evans writes—that had thirteen local editions.

Harold Evans became a master of high-profile crusades.

TOM BACHTELL

Soon, Evans decided to try for college. At the time, there were fourteen English universities, and he wrote to them all, finally talking his way into the University of Durham. He presents this as his big break in life, although, as he reminds us throughout "My Paper Chase," Durham was no Oxford when it came to credentialling purposes, even in journalism. After college, he went to the Manchester *Evening News*, in a period when it seemed like nearly the center of the journalistic universe; the city "simply throbbed with news day and night." Nine years later, he was made the editor of the *Northern Echo*, in Darlington.

All through this painstakingly recounted rise, Evans was anything but oppositional to the social order; rather, he was a Horatio Alger hero, an improver of himself and of the world around him. He learned shorthand, tutored members of the Workers' Educational Association, and formed a society of volunteers that spent weekends clearing debris from local woodlands. He worked much longer and harder than Eliza Doolittle to learn to pronounce the letter "H." As a journalist, he crusaded not only against wrongdoing but also for improved commerce in the North of England and for civic beautification. He had his staff produce a series about factory relocation called "They Came North to Success." He worked to represent the interests of the provincial newspapers on the National Council for the Training of Journalists. He calls a son-et-lumière show he organized at Durham Cathedral "the single most exciting and uplifting experience of my time in Darlington, a magical marriage of North East enterprise and artistry to reflect the splendors of human faith and endeavor." (It is impossible to imagine Evans's closest American counterpart, the insouciantly patrician Ben Bradlee, of the Washington *Post*, doing any of these things.) And, at every moment, Evans, in a manner highly atypical of a member of the British chattering classes, has worshipped America as a place where "it was permissible to dream."

It's important to understand all this about Evans in order to understand him as a journalist. During two years that he spent travelling around the United States on a Harkness Fellowship, in the mid-nineteen-fifties—he joined a long line of British journalists groomed in that way, from Alistair Cooke to Andrew Sullivan—he encountered and was impressed by investigative journalism. America didn't have the kind of dominant national newspapers that Britain did, and the local papers were mightier and more ambitious than their counterparts in Britain. There, the national papers "preferred the rarefied air of Whitehall and Westminster," the tabloid investigations focussed on sex, and the local papers were unremittingly mundane. Evans describes struggling to change a headline at the *Northern Echo* from "MISSING WEST HARTLEPOOL BOY FOUND" to "GANG OF KIDNAPPERS ON THE RUN."

Evans did push the Darlington paper into what he calls "campaigning journalism" (in Britain, the editor of a provincial paper runs both the news and the opinion pages, and serves as a kind of civic impresario, using the paper to promote causes), but these early forays were consistent with his self-consciousness as a local booster. His first big campaign was against pollution from an Imperial Chemical Industries plant, the kind of pollution that reinforced stereotypes of cities in the North as being foul and unpleasant. Another campaign was for the exoneration of a bakery-van driver who had been executed for murder, a just cause that also played to the readers' sense that working people in the North were always being done wrong by establishment toffs, who ran the court system along with everything else.

It's important, too, that these campaigns sat atop a large and sturdy base of unglamorous, essential information that the newspapers of the North provided their readers. Journalism in Britain may not have been a profession, but it was a skilled trade in the best sense. Manchester, when Evans joined the *Evening News*, in 1952, was home to twenty-six newspapers. Evans lovingly and evocatively describes the vanished newsroom of Linotype machines and gigantic manual typewriters, nearly as noisy and smelly as a factory floor. The best passage in this book is an extended set piece about the work that a copy editor (known as a "sub") did on a British paper in the fifties, with all the calmness, efficiency, and speed that Evans's father brought to his railroad work. Newspapers thrived because they had figured out a way to perform what was then an indispensable and logistically difficult service, one that was impossible for anybody else to replicate.

Evans managed not only to boost the *Northern Echo* but also to generate a national reputation for himself, mainly by appearing as the token provincial on a television program called "What the Papers Say." At thirty-six, he was summoned to London and offered the job of managing editor of the *Sunday Times*. Not long afterward, the editor left and Evans got the job. Suddenly, he was being driven to work by a chauffeur (and also riding around London on a motorcycle), working in an office that looked "like an elegant drawing room," and supervising a staff that was substantially made up of Oxford and Cambridge men, whose upper-class credentials and accents he describes almost obsessively, all these years later.

This was the great glorious time in Evans's career, and the most glorious aspect of it was the work done by the paper's "Insight" team: it included journalistic espionage (often directed at government spy agencies), quick-cycle history, scientific research (on topics like airline and drug safety), and the sort of campaigning that Evans had perfected in Darlington. The team memorably took on the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the birth defects caused by Thalidomide and the lack of justice for its victims, the infestation of the British intelligence service by upper-crust spies, and wars and human-rights abuses around the world—all in the face of government restrictions on the press that were much more severe than in the United States, or in the United Kingdom today. The *Sunday Times*' proprietor during most of this period, Roy Thomson, was, in Evans's account, peculiar and inaccessible but also wholly supportive. Thalidomide was manufactured by a liquor company that was the *Sunday Times*' largest advertiser. "You happy in your own mind, Harold?" was all Thomson said when Evans wanted to publish the diaries of a Cabinet minister despite government warnings that doing so might violate the Official Secrets Act.

All this was happening at roughly the same time as Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, and the early glories of magazine "new journalism" in the United States.

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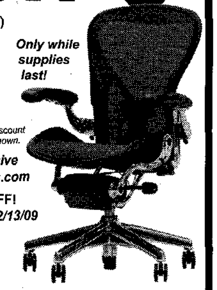

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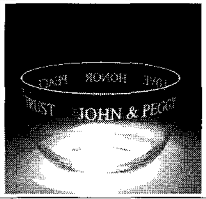

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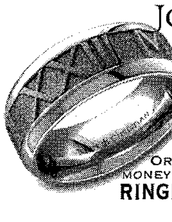

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Evans and the people he worked with were major contributors to a supercharged new conception of what journalism could be: at once powerful and devoted to the powerless, literary and intellectual, glamorous and dutiful, quasi-governmental in its status but in perpetual opposition to government. “No intelligence system, no bureaucracy, can offer the information provided by free competitive reporting,” Evans exclaims at one point. The financial condition of journalism was scarcely a topic of concern. Benign owners like Thomson were doing just fine for themselves; until quite recently, big-city newspaper publishing was a highly profitable business. (The *Sunday Times* under Evans had an editorial staff of a hundred and sixty; by 2000, a typical big metropolitan daily newspaper in the United States had a newsroom head count of double or triple that.) And if one owner’s interest in supporting journalism ever flagged, well, there was a long line of other rich people waiting to get into this exalted game. It was during this time that David Halberstam wrote a book about large news organizations and gave it the title “The Powers That Be.”

Evans’s fall was, as he notes, ultimately the fault of the *Sunday Times’* all-powerful unions: resisting the computer revolution, they caused publication to cease for an entire year, during Britain’s “winter of discontent” period, in the late nineteen-seventies, and forced the Thomson family to sell. (Evans, the son of a union man, applauds Murdoch’s ruthless breaking of the unions in the nineteen-eighties.) Even after that, the fundamental economics of the newspaper business looked very strong: such, alas, are the “vanished times” of Evans’s subtitle. Evans himself had a rockier time of it. Murdoch persuaded him to accept what looked like a promotion, to the editorship of the daily *Times*, spent a few months having lieutenants make his life miserable, and then asked for his resignation.

Evans skates over the past quarter century of his career, which was spent almost entirely in America, in a single chapter. For the record, he held a number of big jobs in this country. His second wife, Tina Brown, was the editor of *The New Yorker*, and Evans spent a decade at this magazine’s parent company, at first as the founding editor of *Traveler*, later as the head of Random House. In another phase, he worked for *U.S. News & World Report*, which shared an owner with the magazine I worked for, *The Atlantic*, and I had occasion to experience what it’s like to have him affix his startlingly blue eyes on you and give you to understand, through a few artfully mumbled words, that you and he belong to a small company of people who fully grasp the glory of journalism. In his account of this period, Evans is almost entirely diplomatic (except for a well-placed dig at David Gergen, who, as the editor of *U.S. News & World Report*, once asked him to change an editorial to please an advertiser). He experiences the United States as a country without a class system, which undoubtedly helps account for his cheery mood. He ends by acknowledging that things today aren’t as great as in the grand old *Sunday Times* days, and asserting, with characteristic optimism but uncharacteristic lack of specificity, “If we evolve the right financial model, we will enter a golden age of journalism.”

One can think of “My Paper Chase” as a potent exercise in escapist nostalgia—as an intoxicant that’s bound to produce, at least in journalists, the irresistible high of revisiting the halcyon era of the mainstream media. But Evans never actually says that he believes newspapers are going to come back as good as ever. Surely, if he were young today, he would be operating in the digital world, and surely that world is still full of nascent Harold Evanses, as determined to rise as he was. What Evans admits to being nostalgic about is not so much the journalistic past as “the mythic north of my childhood,” where “there was comfort in being rooted in a community and recognized within it as a good neighbor.” Overnight success, especially for a working-class lad, was impossible in that world; instead, one had to mount a long, slow, relentless assault on the battlements of a highly structured social system. The system is gone, as is the way that people like the young Evans operated within it, and what’s most arresting about “My Paper Chase” is that Evans makes us miss them. ♦

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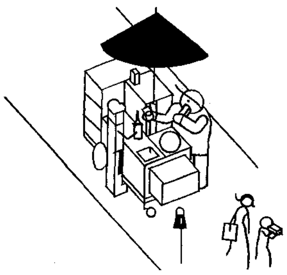
The Book Bench, our literary blog.

BRIEFLY NOTED

The Interrogative Mood: A Novel?, *by Padgett Powell (Ecco; $21.99).* This literary curiosity consists entirely of questions, vacillating between cocktail-party filler ("If you could see a large-animal trainer mauled in the middle of his or her show, perhaps even killed, would you prefer to see the mauling done by a lion, a tiger, or a bear?") and stoner profundity ("Do you like a smooth pond or a ripple upon a pond?"). Buried among the trivia ("Have you ever been not disappointed by a banana split?") are intimations of the abyss ("Do you think of there being a proper point in your debilitation as you age at which you should, if you can, kill yourself?"). Our inquisitor, by turns cantankerous and plaintive, mourns the decline of butter churns and wonders under what circumstances—impending death, perhaps—it might be acceptable to molest a candy striper. There's not a whisper of a plot, but the torrent of queries is hypnotic, and the cumulative effect is of a latter-day Scheherazade, desperately staving off the final answer.

The Book of Fathers, *by Miklós Vámos (translated from the Hungarian by Peter Sherwood; Other Press; $15.95).* Vámos's novel chronicles a Hungarian family from 1705 until the present, as its members pass down their recollections of joy and hardship in the carefully preserved manuscript of the title. The novel proceeds via discrete episodes, each focussing on the life and death of a male progenitor with the ability to see into the past and, often, into the future. Steadily, a portrait emerges of an artistic, emotional group of men with a tendency toward violent death. The great singer Bálint Sternovsky, courting a lost love, is killed in a fall from a window; the gentle-spirited Szilárd Berda-Stern is executed for reading a revolutionary editorial aloud; Nándor Csillag ends his life in a Nazi gas chamber. Vámos's fatalistic narrative follows in the tradition of "One Hundred Years of Solitude," but it stands as a unique and affecting illustration of the vicissitudes of Hungarian history.



The Good Soldiers, *by David Finkel (Sarah Crichton; $26).* Finkel's sad and wonderful account of soldiers' experiences of war follows the 2nd Battalion, 16th Infantry, which was thrown into one of Baghdad's worst districts as part of the 2007 surge. The average age of its eight hundred soldiers was nineteen. Finkel, who spent eight months with the 2-16 in Iraq, accompanies soldiers to their base in Kansas and to a hospital in Texas, where a woman who married her boyfriend just before he was deployed watches him die—five months, four amputations, and multiple emergency surgeries after a bomb hit his Humvee, and a day before his twentieth birthday. Finkel achieves great intimacy with his subjects, charting their changing feelings toward Iraqis, their mission, and their own commander. By the time they are told that they are winning, it's hard to remember or define what that means. After two members of his platoon are killed twelve days before their tour, already extended three months, is to end, a soldier writes to his wife, "I'm gonna need some help when I get home."

The Idea of Justice, *by Amartya Sen (Harvard; $29.95).* John Rawls's "A Theory of Justice," published in 1971, has cast a long shadow over modern political philosophy. Sen's stimulating and eloquent new work is in some ways a commentary on Rawls, but its refinements give his arguments greater applicability. Rawls was a devotee of "ideal theory," but Sen, a Nobel Prize-winning economist and an ardent cosmopolitan, is more willing to consider conflicting value systems, arguing that a successful idea of justice must be pragmatic; for him, the transcendental theories of justice that Rawls adapted from Locke and Kant overlook the fact that individuals, and cultures, inevitably disagree.

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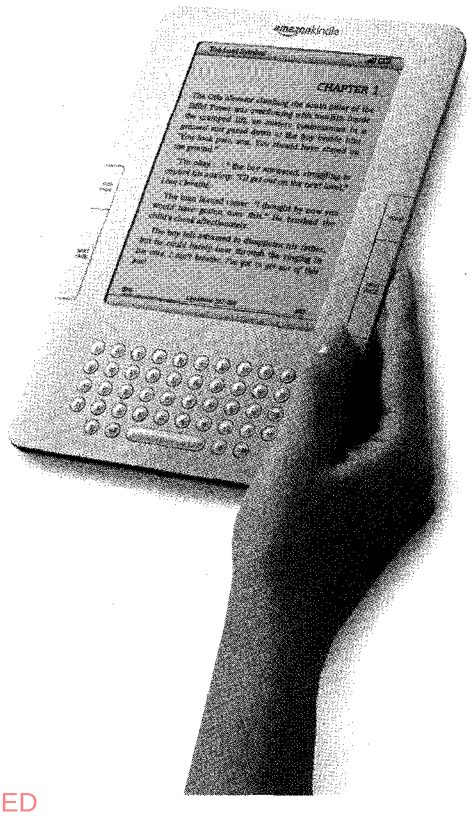

DANCING

A HERO'S WELCOME

Bill T. Jones brings "Fela!" to Broadway.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

"Fela!," the musical, directed by Bill T. Jones, that opened Off Broadway last year and just reopened, at the Eugene O'Neill, begins with Fela Kuti, the father of Afrobeat and, in the nineteen-seventies, one of the most popular musicians in West Africa, performing in his club, the Shrine, in Lagos. This will be his last show there, Kuti says. His native Nigeria has become too dangerous for him.

Fela, as he was known, was born to a prominent family. His father, an Anglican priest, was the headmaster of a school and the first president of the Nigerian Union of Teachers. The mother was a campaigner for women's rights, and two brothers became distinguished physicians. Fela, seemingly to balance his family's respectability, became a club musician (composer, saxophonist, keyboard player), a political activist, and a martyr. In his twenties and thirties, he spent time in England and the United States, picking up various musical influences—jazz, funk, Frank Sinatra, Miles Davis, James Brown. He returned to Africa and fused those elements with African rhythms, thereby inventing Afrobeat. In the U.S., he was converted to the Black Power movement; his song lyrics attacked his country's vicious military government. This endeared him to Nigerians but not to their leaders. In consequence—and also because of his generally irreverent behavior (he liked to perform in his underpants, smoking a joint)—he was frequently arrested. The fiercest attack came in 1977, when soldiers invaded his commune, the Kalakuta Republic; assaulted many of the people living there; and set fire to the place, which housed his recording studio, with all his master tapes. In "Fela!," one survivor reports that soldiers carved their initials into her buttocks. Another says they "pull on my private thing, until it bleeds." Most crushing to Fela was that his elderly mother, whom he revered, was thrown out a window. She died soon afterward. That is when Fela considered leaving Nigeria. In the end, he stayed. He died there, of AIDS, in 1997, at the age of fifty-eight.

Like all after-stories of beloved leaders, the musical's account of Fela has notable omissions. The fact that he criticized Islam, the religion of many Africans, is not spoken of. (He also preached against Christianity, his father's faith.) Fela was a nationalist—a sentiment unpopular in many quarters today—and he felt that the Nigerians should be loyal to the old Yoruba faith. Another matter that gets little attention is Fela's sexual politics. In 1978, he married twenty-seven women in a single ceremony. The resulting domestic arrangement was apparently not a happy one. Some of the wives seem to have left. Fela discarded the others, explaining, "Marriage brings jealousy and selfishness." One wonders how the women—who were his singers and dancers, and thus had reason not to make trouble—felt about the group matrimonial in the first place.

That's the material. And the show? There are two great things in it. One is Sahr Ngaujah, the man who, for most of the week, plays Fela. How did the producers find a performer who matched Fela in charm, wit, and insolence? They must have held a hundred auditions. In some respects, Ngaujah may actually be better than Fela. You can see a lot of Fela clips on YouTube. He is very charismatic, but Ngaujah seems more so, not to speak of the fact that he has all his teeth. He seems completely spontaneous, as if he were delivering his lines for the first time. I am not saying that he could have made a contribution to a Nigerian liberation movement. (For one thing, he's American, with a father from Sierra Leone. The superb band, Antibalas, is from Brooklyn.) And I'm not suggesting that he's a better musician than Fela. (One of the producers, when asked whether Ngaujah was actually playing his saxophone, said that he wouldn't comment.) But Ngaujah is a thrilling actor, with enough moods and tones and nuances so that you have no trouble listening

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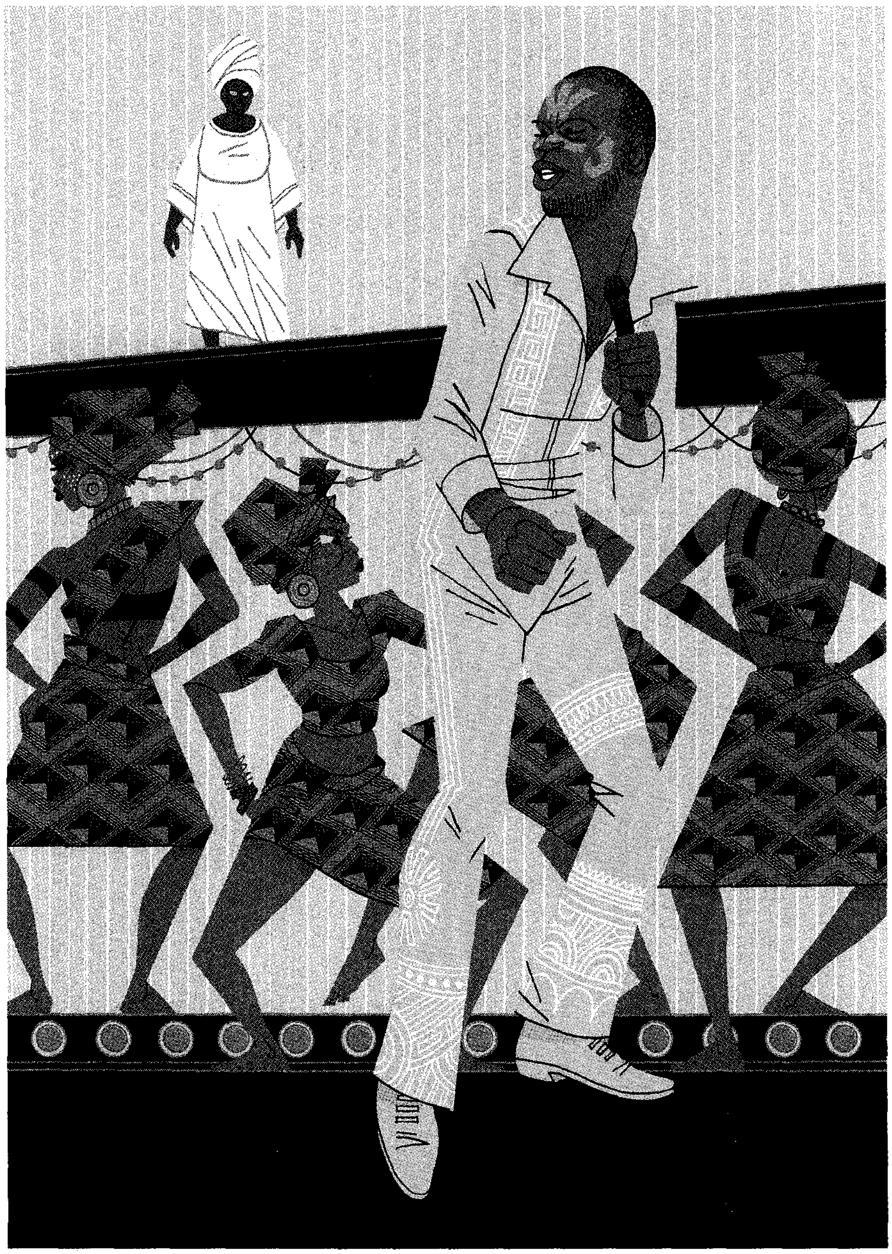
to him for more than two hours straight. He's offstage for only about five minutes of a two-and-a-half-hour show. It's like Hamlet.

The second glory of "Fela!" is the dancing, created by Bill T. Jones. It's hard to make West African dance look bad—this is one of the great dance cultures of the world—but oh, how good Jones and the dancers, more than half of them American-born (the others are African or Caribbean), have made it look. An instructive exercise, again, is to look at the real Fela's company on YouTube. The dancers there are less clear, less fast, and less strong than the dancers in "Fela!" The show's women often stand with their powerful thighs pointing sidewise, so that, like the turned-out legs of a ballet dancer, they can go swiftly in any direction. Do not think that this talk of thighs means that West African dance is a girlie show. Like the crotch in ballet, the rear end and the thighs in African dance are not a matter of sex. Or they are an utterly sublimated matter of sex. The pelvis is the star of this dance style, and the source of its power. Look at it, and you are seeing the uranium core. I should add that the costumes, by Marina Draghici, could not be more perfect. In the first act, most of the women's skirts had some sort of tail-feathers at the rear, which snapped marvellously when the dancer swung her hips. A lot of the skirts started just below the navel, revealing the waist, which is the second-story window of the pelvis. In Act I, before the dancers came on, you could see their whipping skirts peeking past the wings as they warmed up for their entrance. What's coming? you think. And then it comes, and you can't believe it.

Like most Broadway musicals these days, "Fela!" is assaultive. The music is loud; lights are beamed in your eyes. The show's Fela insists on audience participation, as did the real Fela, in keeping with the African tradition of call-and-response. We were supposed to shout "Yeah! Yeah!" when he told us to. We were instructed to stand up and jut our hips out this way and that, for a lesson in Nigerian pelvis rotation. All this carried a subtle note of demagoguery. (The Shrine was well named.) Perhaps it would have been wrong to eliminate this matter from Fela's story, but other matters were eliminated: the sexual politics, the religious views.

As the show moves along, the dance peters out a bit. After the opening section, the dancers often wear shoes—jazz shoes, with a little heel. This is a terrible idea. You can't do proper West African dance without the foot's contact, artistic and symbolic, with the ground. The costumes also change. The women wear long, bunchy skirts, which means that you can't see their bodies very well. The situation gets better, very strikingly, near the end of the show, when Fela journeys to the underworld to visit his mother's ghost. The women, spirits now, wear white skirts and white body paint—gleaming, phosphorescent, in the darkness. They threaten, they stampede. It's hard for stage artists to portray the afterlife. Jones did the best job I've seen.

"Fela!" opened on Broadway soon after Jones's modern-dance show "Serenade / The Proposition," about Abraham Lincoln, had its New York première, at the Joyce. "Serenade" had all of Jones's longtime virtues—for example, wonderful stagecraft (sets, costumes, lighting) and beautiful small groups, trios especially—and all his vices; notably, his self-regard. In the voice-over for "Serenade," he cannot speak of Lincoln, born in 1809, without referring, portentously, to another man, born in 1952. Now, who could that be? Surprise! Bill T. Jones was born in 1952. Maybe he's a big hero, too. That is by no means the end of the autobiographical intrusions into what is supposed to be a meditation on Lincoln. In "Fela!" the obligation to tell another man's story prevents Jones from putting his own story in our face. I hope this happens to him more often. ♦



Sahr Ngaujah gives a thrilling performance as Fela Kuti, the father of Afrobeat.

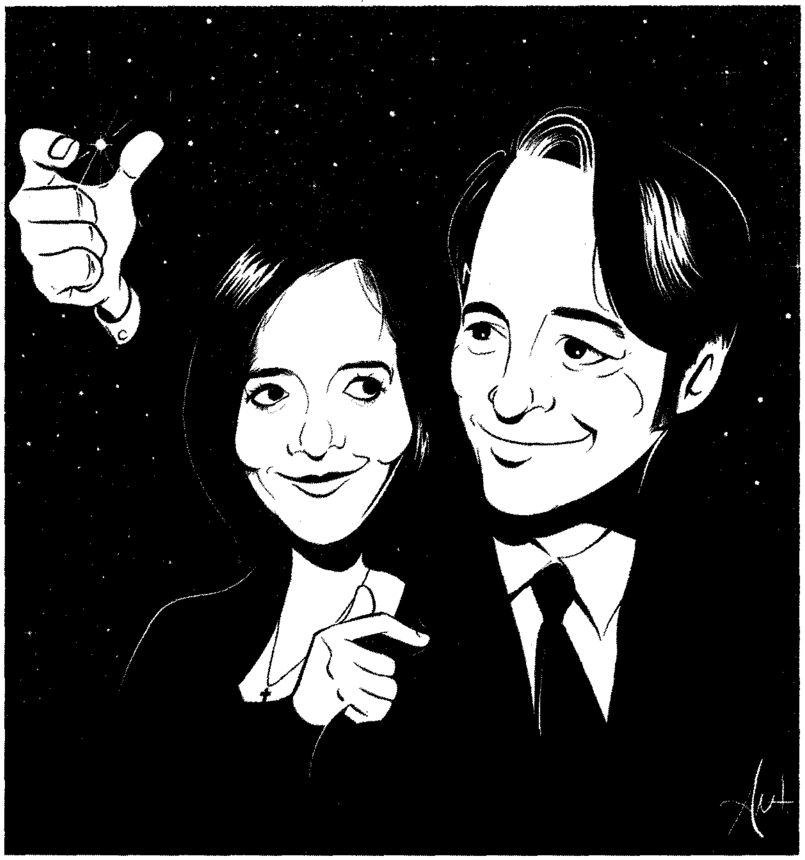
JACOB WEINSTEIN

THE THEATRE

LOST IN SPACE

Kenneth Lonergan's Everyman.

BY JOHN LAHR



Starstruck lovers: Moreno and Broderick in "The Starry Messenger."

ANTONY HARE

The slow loris is one of those animals which survive in the jungle by seeming to play dead. This torpid, wide-eyed creature came to mind as I watched the modest, buttoned-down forty-six-year-old Mark Williams (Matthew Broderick) try to teach astronomy to a group of pesky students at the old Hayden Planetarium in "The Starry Messenger," written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan (at the Acorn). As he politely copes with every annoyance, every put-down, and every rejection from his students, Mark appears to be part pedagogue and part Shmoo. Genial passivity is his ozone: it's a spiritual climate that signals a life as remote and silent as the stars that he points to in his presentation.

The play's title invokes Galileo's 1610 treatise of the same name, in which the astronomer announced his telescopic discoveries for the first time and unsettled the Roman Catholic Church's assumptions about the order of things. In its own lacklustre, long-winded way—at nearly three hours, the play is proof of the peril of having a writer direct his own work—"The Starry Messenger" has similar ambitions: it is a demonstration of life's caprice, which calls Catholic assumptions into question. Unlike Galileo, however, Mark is no pathfinder; there's nothing daring about him. "I think he's kind of boring, don't you?" one of his students says, within earshot, in the opening scene. Mark, who is all too aware of his limitations, would be the first to agree. He has a droll line in self-effacement. Watching "The Big Sleep" on TV, for instance, he says to his wife, Anne (J. Smith-Cameron), "Look, honey. It's Humphrey Bogart. My other self." Fair-minded to a fault, dutiful, full of wonder at the heavens but regret on earth, Mark expresses the resignation of the defeated. He set out to become a practicing astronomer; instead, he has had to settle for teaching. "I get to deliver the news. I'm the messenger," he tells his class. His disappointment has communicated itself to his teen-age son, Adam. "I'm sorry your life hasn't worked out the way you wanted it to, but you don't have to take it out on me," Adam shouts up from the basement. Mark is stalled, and lack of momentum is a problem for both him and the play.

The expert Broderick manages to make his character's timidity both charming and galling. Mark is a son of a bitch disguised as a victim. He's so split off from his anger that he is bewildered when it's pointed out to him. To explain gravity to a particularly vacant student, he jumps off his desk, only to be called out by the student for his sarcasm. He immediately apologizes—he's "a serial apologizer," according to his wife—which is his way of not having to think about his actions. Likewise, with his family, he hides his aggressive indifference behind a show of consideration. When confronted by Anne about the family's complicated arrangements for Christmas, he tunes her out with pliancy. "Anything is fine," he says. "I just can't talk about it right now. Whatever you said is fine." She presses him for a day and a time to talk. "Tomorrow," he says. "Five o'clock." "I don't get home till six," Anne says. "I'll be proud to talk about Christmas at six-fifteen." To make a choice would be to assert his desires, and Mark doesn't know what he wants. Occasionally, during his exchanges with Anne, a rumble of fury breaks through. About the Christmas plans, he mutters, "You should have said no . . . in the first place." "What did you say?" Anne asks, rounding on him. "Nothing," Mark replies, retreating into his shell. "It's fine. I take it back. I take it back." Mark's connection to Adam, who is present only as an offstage voice, is just as tenuous. In one well-written exchange, Mark calls down to Adam in the basement:

MARK: How are you?
ADAM: Fine.
(*Pause*)
MARK: Would you like to know how I am?
ADAM: How are you, Dad?
MARK: I'm fine.
ADAM: Glad to hear it.
MARK: Thank you for asking. . . . I'm glad we could have this chance to talk.

Isolation is Mark's issue. He is unmoored, floating through life, with no connection to anything but the vastness of the galaxies, which are a consoling metaphor for his sense of inconsequence. There's talk of his applying for a less well paid job on a bona-fide astronomy project—to measure the universe. When Anne asks him why he wants it, Mark hedges at first. "I don't know that I do," he says, then admits, "Because it would mean I was part of something." Anne counters, "You're part of something now." Mark doesn't answer; his silence is profound.

Lonergan, of course, stage-manages a connection for the hapless teacher: a sweet-natured Puerto Rican training nurse, Angela Vasquez (the appealing Catalina Sandino Moreno), drops into his classroom to inquire about the possibility of her nine-year-old son's attending the planetarium lectures. As a character, Angela, who is a single mother in her late twenties, is, predictably, the shiny emotional opposite of Anne: spirited, playful, a caring soul, for whom Mark is an object of desire—a good listener and an attentive stand-in for her son's feckless father. Angela does all the heavy lifting in their relationship: first talking him into bed, then pursuing him to his classroom, where, like a linebacker, she tackles him passionately to the floor. Dramaturgically, this is crude, unlikely stuff; thematically, it brings Mark, an avowed atheist, into connection with a devout Catholic. But when Angela angles for Mark to marry her—"You can't have it both ways. Sometimes you gotta make up your mind," she tells him—he can't. "It's my life, partly, at least," he says. "I can't defend it. If you want to stop, let's stop. Only don't expect me to be the one to say it." The relationship comes to an abrupt halt when Angela suffers a real tragedy—which a priest tells her is divine retribution for her sins with Mark.

Lonergan, who has two Oscar nominations to his credit—for the films "Gangs of New York" and "You Can Count on Me"—has written a screenplay, not a drama. To understand the aggression behind Mark's passivity, we would need to see how crazy it makes the other people in his life. Instead, Lonergan keeps the focus on Mark, and the expositional scenes just don't add up. He can't pull together his moral argument or clinch the emotional transformations he forces on his characters. Unable to find a compelling rhythm, "The Starry Messenger" just sort of ambles to its conclusion.

The cast, however, is uniformly excellent. I particularly enjoyed Kieran Culkin's Ian, an insolent student whose pointed midterm feedback Mark takes to heart. "There's a kindness and a sincerity to your personality," Ian says. "But, I have to say, it's not enough to hold my attention for the duration of a three-hour class." And a series of short scenes at the hospital between Angela and a gruff, clear-eyed patient, Norman Ketterly (the outstanding Merwin Goldsmith), ring vividly true. "You're not my type," Norman tells Angela. "I like a skinny, unpleasant, abusive woman who looks kind of furious all the time and yells at me, on a kind of quota system." When Angela suffers her loss, she seeks Ketterly's counsel about what the priest has told her. Lonergan lets Ketterly speak truth to despair. "Nobody knows anything," he tells Angela. "We're all just guessing."

"Life is more fantastic than imagination allows," Mark tells his class in his final lecture. This is, I guess, an attempt to justify the implausibility of Lonergan's plot. Miracles happen for Mark, and, by the last beat of the play, he both knows his desire and can act on it. It's a kind of Hollywood ending—and a recipe for more chaos after the curtain falls. ♦

BLOCK THAT METAPHOR!

From the Lawrence (Kans.) Journal-World.

"Obviously, it's been a very difficult two days for us," Nelson said. "We kind of saw the writing on the wall Friday night. It's just apples versus oranges, and it's not a level playing field by any means."

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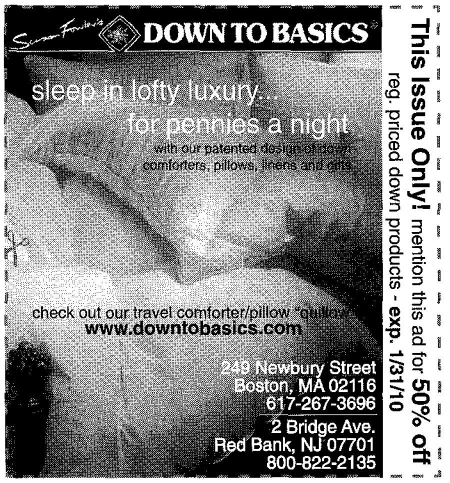

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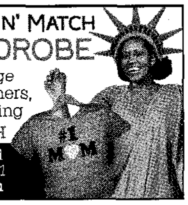

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

NOWHERE MAN

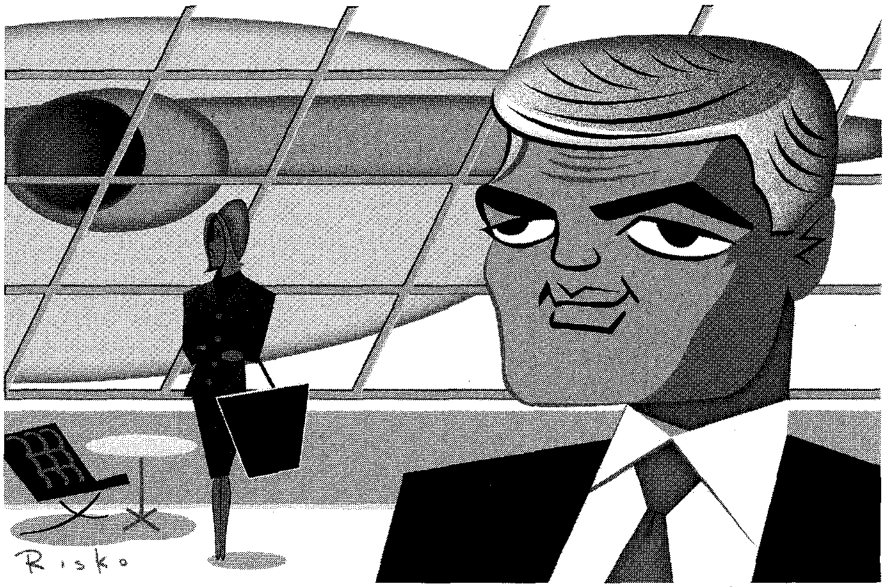
"Up in the Air."

BY ANTHONY LANE

For those of us who look to the skies, two major releases compel attention. They make the perfect couple. One is "Up in the Air," the new film from Jason Reitman, who made "Thank You for Smoking" and "Juno." The other is "Come Fly with Me," which has been reissued on vinyl by Capitol, fifty-one years after its first appearance, in the unpolluted mono sound that God—or Frank Sinatra—intended. The half-century that is bracketed by the album and the film has witnessed both the expansion and the degradation of a dream. The tilt of Sinatra's hat, on the cover of the LP, and the position of his hands (one lightly holding a woman's, the other motioning with jerked thumb, as if a trip to Capri were as swift and painless as hitching a ride) inform us that, thanks to airplanes, the world is now his, and ours, for the asking. Whereas the face of Ryan Bingham (George Clooney), in the final moments of "Up in the Air," as he stares at an airport departures board, bears the lagged blankness of someone who has long since forgotten what to ask for.

"To know me is to fly with me," Bingham says in an early voice-over, choosing his words, as ever, to sound like an advertising campaign. My guess would be that he has read so many in-flight magazines over the years (we never see him with a book) that his prose rhythms have adapted accordingly, just as his digestion is attuned to hotel menus and complimentary drinks. Last year, he says, three hundred and twenty-two days were spent travelling, leaving "forty-three miserable days at home," in Omaha. Now and then, we see his apartment, and it's just like a hotel suite, minus the personal warmth—no room service, no express checkout, not even a chocolate on the pillow. Bingham is *Homo peripateticus*, seeing neither purpose nor profit in being at rest. "The slower we move, the faster we die," he says to a business gathering. "We are not swans. We're sharks."

It makes sense, then, that this particular shark is engaged in daily kills. Bingham is part of a company, run by the conscience-free Craig Gregory (Jason Bateman), that does the dirty work for the heads of other firms who lack the guts, or the heart, to do it themselves: it fires their employees. Bingham is unparalleled at this; he could land in London at dawn, dethrone the Queen, explain the terms of her severance package, and be out of there before breakfast. "Up in the Air" was shot in the first months of this year: "the worst time," as Gregory tells his staff, adding modestly, "This is our moment." His joy at the prospect of depression is a fearsome thing, and Reitman, to his credit, does not stint on the facts. Bingham may thrive on perks and upgrades, but the grit of his job means standing around in slush-laden parking lots, under gray-white skies, and marching into offices where the workers go quiet and hunched at the sight of him, as if he were an exorcist, or a cop. Indeed, the film begins with a sequence of talking heads—the faces and expostulations of the newly sacked, as they respond to the life-draining news. If you're wondering why they seem so artless and sincere in their dismay, that's because they are; far from being Hollywood bit players, these are real victims of job loss, found in St. Louis and Detroit.



Vera Farmiga and George Clooney in Jason Reitman's new movie.

For all that, the film is a hybrid. Its backdrop is despair, but the foreground action has the silvery zest of a comedy. The traditional comic task of the American female has been to shock the male monomaniac into seeing how rich and multitudinous his bone-dry life could be. That was what Katharine Hepburn did to the ossified Cary Grant in "Bringing Up Baby." What's fresh and rousing about "Up in the Air" is that, when Bingham meets Alex (Vera Farmiga), it's more like Cary Grant bumping into his twin soul. They get talking in a hotel bar—where else?—and, before long, they are comparing the contents of their wallets. Not money, which is soiled stuff (on reflection, you realize how cashless the movie is), but credit cards, room keys, memberships, privileges, and points. "I'll bet it's huge," Alex says. "You have no idea," Bingham replies. He means his tally of air miles, of course, or rather his goal as a miles collector: ten million. He sleeps with Alex that night, but he still can't divulge the magic number. A fellow has to have some secrets.

We never discover what Alex does,

ROBERT RISKO

except that she's a fellow-shark. There's a wonderful image, postcoitus, when they sit at their laptops and find a common gap in their schedules for the next encounter; filmed from the side, each becomes a mirror of the other. At no point does technology recede; from separate cities, they compensate with phone sex—or, rather, with text sex, though neither of them actually bothers with self-pleasure. Fingers are for buttons. It's on her cell phone, naturally, that Alex calls Bingham and confides, "I am the woman you don't have to worry about. Just think of me as yourself, only with a vagina." Is that a threat, a fantasy made flesh, or the only way in which warmer feelings can register between these cool, ungrounded spirits? Whatever the case, Alex is the role that Vera Farmiga has been waiting for, because she has the inestimable gift, hard to find these days, of being able to ice over and then thaw, in a matter of seconds. I have been a devotee since "The Departed," which she stole from Scorsese's overblown gangsters; and the late Anthony Minghella, who shared my adulation, used "Breaking and Entering" to bring out her worldly, playful toughness, with a hint of wounds beneath. Here, against Clooney's Bingham, she wields her wits like knives, but there's such grace in the wielding, and she makes so free with her desires, that you can feel him—and the audience—yearning to know more. And a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, for a man who laughs at love.

More unsettling news: Natalie (Anna Kendrick) has to be strung along on his next roster of flights. She has joined the company with a plan to transform the dolorous act of termination into an iChat. Rather than travel to another town and fire people, you could stay in one spot and use videoconferencing screens. Bingham is appalled, on two grounds: first, his footloose habits would have to stop, and, second, he does, despite everything, retain some principles—the least you can offer, when you're destroying a human being, is to do it face to face. This is clever plotting; it's career-based, but it also allows Reitman to double the romantic pressure, since our hero now has twice as many reasons to inspect his prejudices and emerge from the safety of his shell. That's why a touch of hokeyness intrudes, by necessity, in the later stages, as he decides to attend the wedding of his sister (Melanie Lynskey), taking Alex as his unexpected date. We can sense his emotions—his private economy—starting to rise out of recession.

Viewers must learn for themselves what happens next. Let's just say that the tension between the bleak and the blithe, the prime source of this movie's strength, is sustained by Reitman to the end. If anything, I would have tugged harder on the bleakness—jettisoned Rolfe Kent's jaunty score, with its pizzicati and its busy drumming, in favor of something more austere. When it comes to airport movies, the spectrum runs from Chris Marker's "La Jetée," in which a fatality and the recollection of a woman's face are all that is preserved, in frozen images, of a scene at Orly, where Jacques Tati later set some of "Playtime"; through the ruefulness of "The Terminal," an oddly sedentary project for a director as kinetic as Spielberg; and so to the sugared reassurance of "Love Actually," in which Hugh Grant solemnly announces that, at places like Heathrow, "love actually is all around." Only someone who is regularly fast-tracked through first class, or has never waited five hours with kids and luggage, could write so glutinous a line, and "Up in the Air" should be read as a rebuke to wishful thinking. Airports are the seedbed for all that is most alien, angering, and atomized in our twenty-first-century days, and there are times, in this film, when Clooney's eyes appear to glaze and say, Come die with me.

And yet he is George Clooney. The suits that Bingham wears may be a little cheap, but the actor's fondness for well-cut irony is intact, and, having divided his screen time among cranky stiffs ("Burn After Reading," "The Men Who Stare at Goats"), troubled defenders of honor ("Good Night, and Good Luck," "Syriana"), and gossamer smoothies (anything with "Ocean" in the title), he now has his first opportunity to shuffle the three together. Bingham is both wise guy and doofus, a player so expert at the rules of the game (always stand behind Asians at airport security, he tells Natalie, because they wear slip-on shoes) that he doesn't notice, until too late, that the game has hollowed him out. "We are here to make limbo tolerable," he says of his profession, though his is the genuine purgatory. Like Cary Grant, he looks down to one side and smiles whenever he is lost in thought—a hopelessly endearing tic. But those thoughts are up in the clouds. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
The Front Row, a blog about movies.

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VOLUME LXXXV, NO. 40, December 7, 2009. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for five combined issues: February 9 & 16, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, August 10 & 17, and December 21 & 28) by Condé Nast Publications, which is a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: The Condé Nast Building, 4 Times Square, New York, NY 10036. Elizabeth Hughes, vice-president and publisher; Beth Lusko, associate publisher advertising; Anjali Saigal, associate publisher marketing services; James Guilfoyle, director of finance and business operations; Lynn Oberlander, general counsel. Condé Nast Publications: S. I. Newhouse, Jr., chairman; Charles H. Townsend, president and C.E.O.; John W. Bellando, executive vice-president and C.O.O.; Jennifer Graham, senior vice-president-finance; Jill Bright, executive vice-president/human resources. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001. Canada Post: return undeliverable Canadian addresses to P.O. Box 874, Station Main, Markham, ON L3P 8L4.

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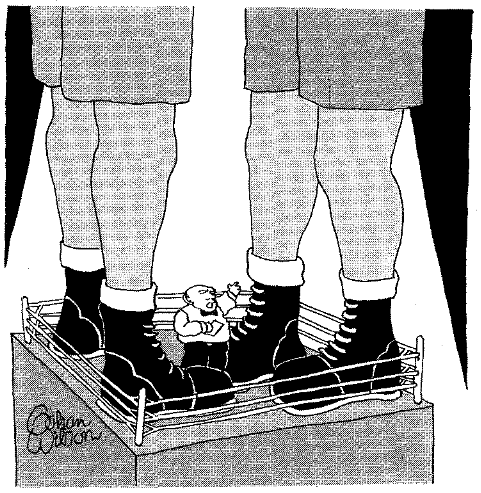
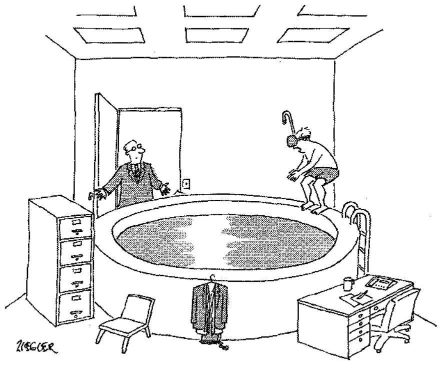
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Drew Dernavich, must be received by Sunday, December 6th. The finalists in the November 23rd contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 21st & 28th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the U.S. or Canada (except Quebec) age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"And, in this corner, also hailing from Chernobyl . . ."
Tim Herbert, Plainfield, N.H.



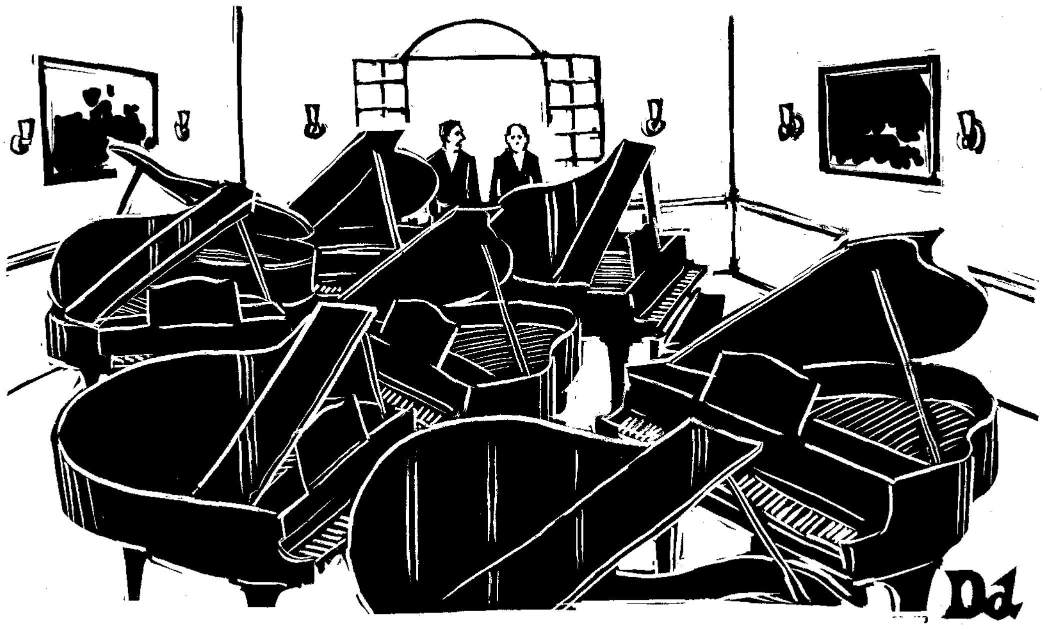
THE FINALISTS

"My wife won't let me put one in the back yard."
Claude Lempereur, Levittown, N.Y.

"Don't worry, I ate lunch more than an hour ago."
Michael Cianfrani, San Francisco, Calif.

"Make yourself useful—fake some Russian and hold up a 9.9."
Christopher Rulff, St. Paul, Minn.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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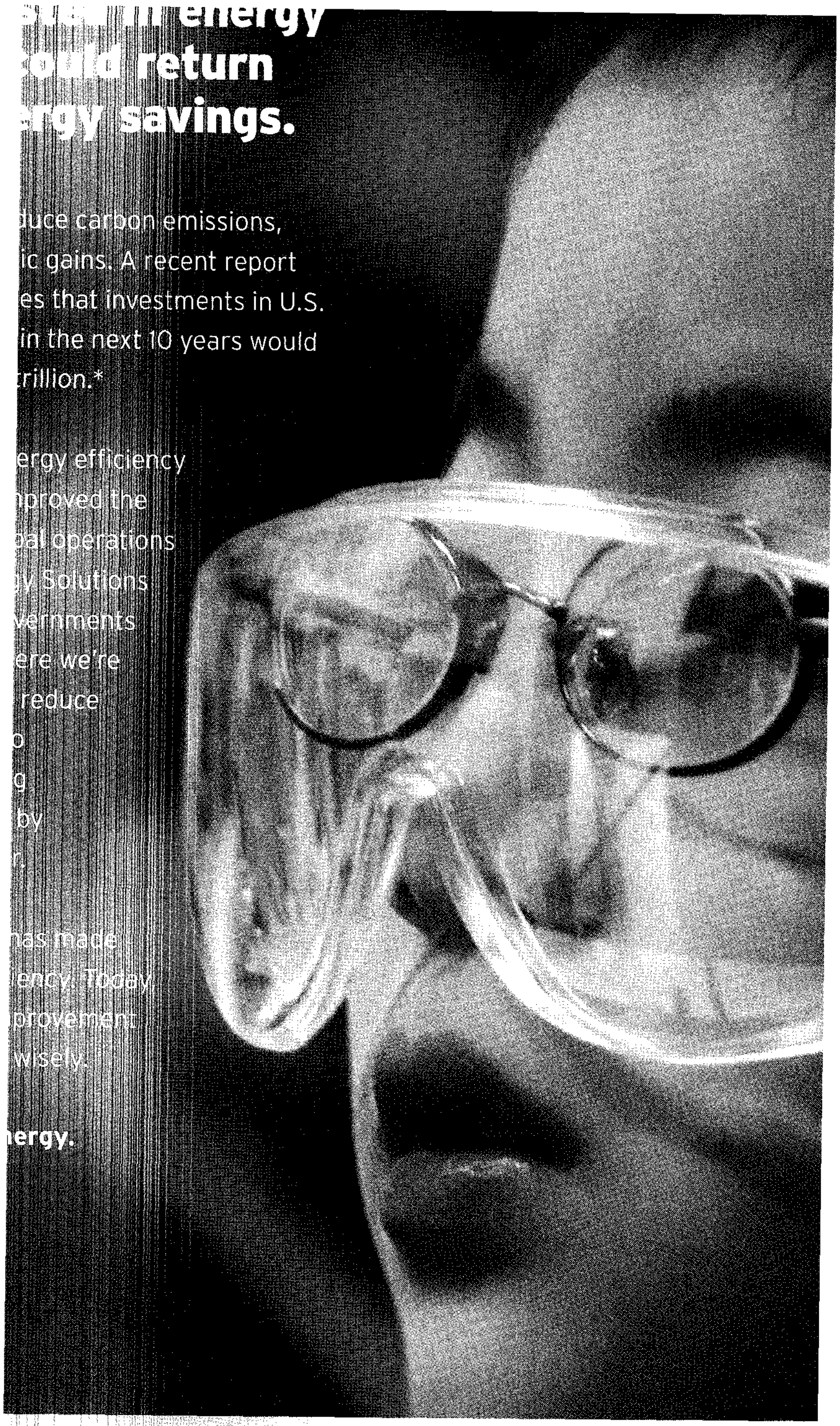

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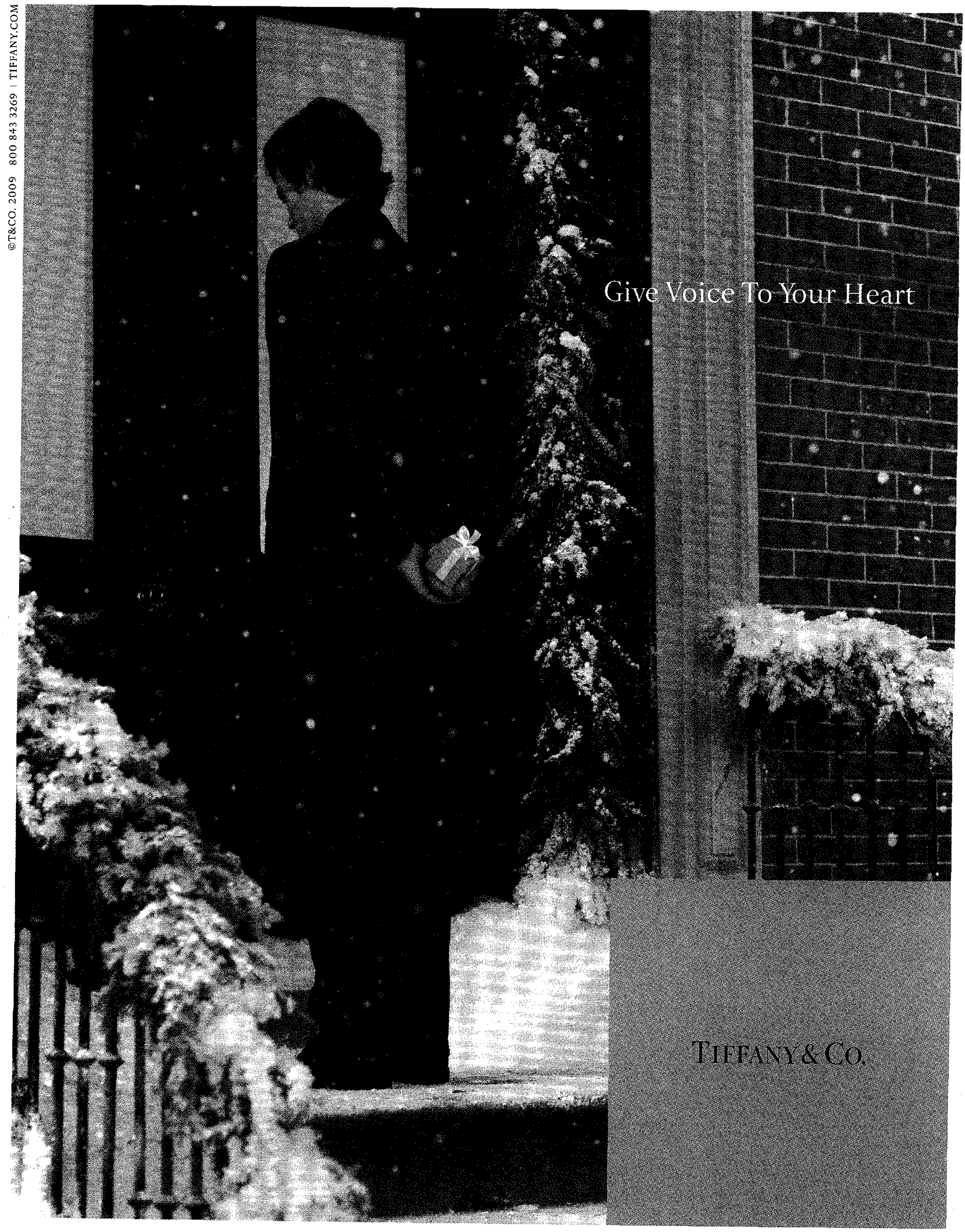
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